

JEWISH FEASTS AND FASTS

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by

JULIUS H. GREENSTONE



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1945

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Desiring to honor Doctor Julius H. Greenstone on the occasion of his seventieth birthday, in April 1943, a number of his friends, pupils and admirers collected these essays which they now take pleasure in presenting to the public in book form. The essays reflect Doctor Greenstone's learning and piety and express his love of Jewish law and life.

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JEWISH FEASTS AND FASTS

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1

FESTIVALS

THE Jewish people, despite their long and rich history and diversified experiences, developed but few holidays as compared with peoples and religious denominations of more recent origin. The aspersion cast upon them in antiquity that they were a people of idlers who spent their days in festive and religious devotions, although a favorite taunt of the classic anti-Semites of the Greek and Roman periods, was never justified in fact. Only five festivals are prescribed in the Bible, eight days in all being required for their observance in the entire Jewish calendar year. The institution of the second day festival, introduced by the people living outside of Jerusalem and continued to the present time, added six more days. The festival of Purim, although found in the Bible, was never regarded as a day of sacred devotion and did not even demand abstention from labor. It is designated as a minor festival, as is also the still younger Hanukkah feast, which originated in the declining years of the Jewish Commonwealth.

The rabbis, with obvious satirical intent, elaborated upon this charge of "indolence and sloth," hurled against the Jews of antiquity by the Greek and Roman writers, and furnished a lengthy catalogue of observances as practised by them in their days. They put the accusations of the enemies of Israel into the mouth of Haman, when he presented his charges to the King in behalf of his plan to

exterminate the Jews of Persia (Megillah 13b; *Talkut Esther* §1054; compare especially *Targum Sheni* to Esther 3.8). The rabbinic phrase put into the mouths of the enemies of the Jews is *Shehi Pehi* which the lexicons render "standing still and sauntering about in idleness." Rashi, however, renders the phrase as an abbreviation, standing for the words "Today is Sabbath; today is Passover," the excuse given by the Jews for their refusal to engage in labor. The rabbis apparently knew of the charges brought against the Jews by the classic writers and dealt with them in their characteristic homiletic style.

The Jewish holidays, whatever their primitive reason was, fall into two distinct categories. The three festivals — Pesah, Shabuot and Sukkot — stemmed from the early pastoral and agricultural life of the people, and were later clothed with historical significance. All were intimately associated with the great event at the very threshold of our national existence — the exodus from Egypt. To this day, these agricultural and historical significances are kept alive through ceremonial and symbolism. But dominating both aspects is the religious import of the festivals which makes of these days occasions for arousing the sense of gratitude to God and recalling the obligations which we owe Him. In the services arranged for these days and in the ceremonies prescribed for them, the religious motive is constantly emphasized and made pre-eminent over all other ideas which they may suggest. In arousing the Jewish national consciousness, in stressing the common bond that unites all Israel, in stimulating loyalty and devotion to the national heritage and to the national aspirations, these festivals aim primarily to evoke feelings of love and adoration for divine Providence that has guided Israel's destinies and made the occasions for their observance possible. They thus express not merely the joy of a people that was released from slavery and welded into a nation, but more especially

the idea that it was God's hand that brought about this redemption, which was to serve a great, universal purpose.

The two holy days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, are distinctly religious in nature and have neither a national nor an agricultural significance. In the laws governing their observance, Rosh Hashanah resembles the three festivals, while Yom Kippur is designated as the "Sabbath of Sabbaths" and has a special ritual of its own. Both appeal to the individual conscience, and are intended, at least in their development in Jewish history, to move the individual Jew to take an account of his spiritual life and become more deeply conscious of the divine spark that is within him. They are not to be observed in sadness and sorrow. They are to be kept as holidays. All mourning is prohibited; dress and food are to be of the best one can afford; and even on the fast day of Yom Kippur a festive rather than a mournful spirit prevails. With the thought of human backsliding and frailty, of the falling away from the standards set up for moral and religious conduct, is associated the feeling that a merciful Providence is ready to assist man in his efforts to approach his destiny, forgiving the past errors of those who would return to the religious life in sincerity. These two holidays, quite distinct from the three pilgrim feasts, are thus of a universal character and might profitably be accepted by all men, of whatever nationality or religious affiliation, as has been suggested by one of our foremost savants.

Special seasons set aside for religious contemplation and for self-scrutiny have tremendous value, bringing out the nobler qualities in human nature. The holy days and the holidays keep us mindful of our true natures as Jews and as human beings.

FAST DAYS

The Jewish calendar year contains six fast days, only one of which, the Day of Atonement, is prescribed in the Torah. Four of the other fast days are connected with the events associated with the final dissolution of the Jewish national life, the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people from their land. The sixth fast day is of much later origin, and commemorates the miraculous escape of the Jews of Persia from Haman's plots against them. The Day of Atonement is thus the only fast day of a purely religious character, while the other five days are of a national nature, recalling the sad plights of our ancestors in the times of their greatest misfortunes. Since no distinct line of demarkation is drawn between national and religious observances in Judaism, all of these days have assumed a religious character and are treated as religious practices incumbent upon all Jews.

Sharp differences, however, are drawn between the fast of the Day of Atonement and the other fast days. While all other fasts may not be observed on the Sabbath, the Day of Atonement is kept as a fast day even when it falls on a Sabbath. The fast of the Ninth of Ab and of the Day of Atonement are equally rigorous as distinguished from the other days. They both begin at sunset and last until the following sunset, while the other fast days are observed only from sunrise to sunset of the same day. Several other details in the observance of the days are common to both these fast days and do not apply to the other days. A popular saying thus characterizes the relative importance of the various fast days: The black (Ninth of Ab) and the white (Day of Atonement) are obligatory; the long (Seventeenth of Tammuz) and the short (Tenth of Tebet) are commanded; the "he" (Fast of Gedaliah) and the "she" (Fast

of Esther) are optional. In the course of time, several other public fasts were instituted in various communities, but these have not met with general acceptance.

Fasting as a religious exercise by individuals is found among Jews as among other religions, but the prophets as well as the rabbis sought to divert the minds of the people from the ascetic element involved in fasting to the moral and spiritual value that the fast day may suggest. "It is characteristic of the Rabbis," says Claude G. Montefiore, "that they chose for the prophetic lesson upon the morning of the Atonement-Day, the fast par excellence of the entire year, the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, in which the true fast is declared to consist exclusively in moral well-doing; and upon the afternoon the Book of Jonah, in which they were well able to point out that God spared Nineveh, not because the people fasted and covered themselves with sackcloth, but because they turned from their evil ways and from the violence that was in their hands." Although some of the Rabbis considered the affliction of one's body as the offering up of one's blood and flesh as a sacrifice on the altar, the general opinion was that the chief value of the fast was the charity distributed, the earnest prayers uttered then, and the change of heart that usually accompanied such prayers. The idea of self-mortification is foreign to Judaism, and while examples of asceticism may be found here and there in rabbinic literature, the habitual faster was regarded as a sinner, and some of the rabbis distinctly forbade their disciples from indulging in excessive self-restraint, as this might lead to conceit and even to hypocrisy.

Mondays and Thursdays were favorite days for fasting, probably because of the belief that the courts of heaven were in session then, even as the earthly courts held session on these market-days. There are several allusions to these

self-imposed fasts, observed twice every week, also in the New Testament; and in an early Christian work, the *Didache*, Christians are warned not to fast with the hypocrites on the second and fifth days of the week, but rather on the fourth and sixth days. In later Jewish practice, three days, Monday, Thursday and the following Monday, coming after the holidays of Passover and Sukkot, were observed as fast days to atone for any misdeeds that may have been perpetrated in the hilarity of the holiday season. Fast days were often imposed by the rabbinic authorities in cases of drought or pestilence or other calamities that threatened the community.

I

ROSH HASHANAH

(NEW YEAR)

ROSH HASHANAH

OF THE various names by which the New Year holiday is referred to in the Bible, the term Rosh Hashanah is the one most seldom used. In fact it is found only once (Ezekiel 40:1) and even there it is doubtful whether the reference is to the holiday celebrated on the first day of Tishri. Bible critics are inclined to believe that the New Year was originally celebrated by the Jews in the autumn season, as it was indeed by many other Semitic tribes, and was later shifted to the first of Nisan, corresponding to the vernal equinox. In post-biblical times, it was again observed on the first of Tishri, although Nisan was regarded as the first month of the year in respect to civil matters.

The nature of the holiday as a solemn occasion is not clearly set forth in the Bible; it was developed in later years through the teachings of the rabbis. The proximity of Rosh Hashanah to the Day of Atonement probably accounts for the fact that it partakes of the nature of the latter as a day of judgment. In the Bible it is designated as "the day of blowing the horn" or as "the memorial of blowing of the horn" and there is no indication of the significance given to it later as "the day of judgment" or "the day of memorial," by which it is referred to in the liturgy. In associating the holiday with the New Year, the sages surrounded it with a halo of solemnity and awe, even as the New Moon was formerly regarded as a miniature day of judgment.

With their genius for religion, our ancestors developed the idea of God sitting in judgment during this season,

making the final decree which meted out to each individual his fate for the coming year, dependent upon and conditioned by the individual's effort toward repentance and improvement. Thus, the first ten days of Tishri are known as the Penitential Season, the Solemn Days; they stir within the soul of every person the feeling of inadequacy, of falling in the spiritual scale, of slipping away from the path of righteousness. At the same time, however, they bring with them the message of hope that it is possible for human beings to improve their natures, to rise above the petty things of material existence and to come closer to the ideal of self-realization, which is synonymous with the ideal of happiness. Through *Teshubah*, repentance, renewal, return to the real nature within us, the keynote of this season, we are promised — and we are made to feel most keenly the reality of this promise — that by our own efforts we may regain the crowning glory of our manhood or womanhood and come in more direct contact with the divine.

There are few home ceremonies connected with Rosh Hashanah. After the *Kiddush* is recited over the cup of wine on the evening of the holiday, the head of the household, dipping slices of a sweet apple in honey, distributes them to the various members of the family. Before partaking of them, each one offers up the prayer: "May it be Thy will, O Lord, to grant us a happy and sweet year." It is also customary to partake, during the meal, of the head of a fish or a fowl or of another animal, and to recite the prayer that we may be at the head and not at the tail in the struggle for life. Sour or bitter foods are avoided and for a mystical reason nuts are not eaten during the holiday (the numerical value of the Hebrew word for nut, *egoz*, is the same as that for sin, *het*). Ezra and Nehemiah told the returned exiles to eat good things and drink sweet wine on that day (Nehemiah 8.9) and the Talmud mentions the Babylonian

custom of eating sweets on Rosh Hashanah. The greeting extended to friends and relatives is: "May you be inscribed for a happy year," and this legend also appears on the greeting cards sent to friends.

2

THE SHOFAR

The most significant ceremony connected with the synagogue services during the two days of Rosh Hashanah is that of the blowing of the *Shofar* at intervals in the service. The *Shofar*, or ram's horn, is the most primitive surviving musical wind instrument. In most synagogues it is the only musical instrument used. It cannot be determined whether the *Shofar* was native to the Israelite shepherd tribes or was borrowed by them from some other tribes. Throughout Jewish history the *Shofar* has been used for secular and religious purposes. It continued in use both among the people in their towns and villages and by the priests, even after the elaborate musical services, with their variety of instruments, had been introduced into the Temple. The *Shofar's* primary function in public affairs was apparently to arouse attention and direct the minds of the people to certain announcements. Thus the Sabbath, New Moons, and festivals were ushered in by blasts of the *Shofar*. It was also used in connection with the coronation of a king and was prominent at the revelation at Mt. Sinai.

In describing the first day of Tishri as "a memorial of blowing the trumpet" or as "a day of blowing the trumpet," the Torah gives no inkling as to the kind of instrument to be used. Tradition, however, fixed the instrument to be the *Shofar*, and the rabbis went to great lengths to find biblical support for this tradition. When the first of Tishri came to

be regarded as the New Year, the blowing of the *Shofar* was given a religious significance, making it serve as a warning to the people to pause in their earthly pursuits and direct their attention to their spiritual well-being. Amos, the earliest of the literary prophets, speaks of the *Shofar* as a means of arousing the conscience of the people and inclining them to solemn thoughts and contemplation; and Ezekiel speaks of the person who takes no warning from the sound of the *Shofar* as the sinner who may hope for no redemption.

When the New Year became associated with the Day of Judgment, additional meaning was attached to the sound of the *Shofar*, and its significance was enriched with religious and spiritual import. The later rabbis and the mystics expressed the opinion that the sounds of the *Shofar* are intended to confuse Satan when he comes before the throne of the Almighty to bring his accusations against the children of Israel. Modern Bible students, who see taboos and prohibitions induced by fear in every ancient religious custom or idea, advanced the theory that the *Shofar* was intended primarily to drive away evil spirits. Satan, in this connection, as also in the book of Job, was regarded as the accusing angel who, while not very friendly to human beings, was by no means an evil spirit in the sense in which such spirits were conceived of in primitive theologies. He was not an opponent of the Deity, but an important factor in the maintenance of law and order in the world. The court of heaven was pictured as a replica of the human courts to which people were accustomed, and their imagination built up for them the various elements of the heavenly courtroom in accordance with the pattern of the earthly courts which they saw round about them. This was also the underlying idea in the rabbinic saying that on Yom Kippur Satan is not permitted to appear before the divine court. Special angels are appointed to carry the various sounds of the

Shofar before the throne of God, and to these, designated by name, special prayers are directed.

The *Shofar* is made from the horn of a ram, thus recalling the incident of the sacrifice of Isaac in which Jewish tradition has ever seen a manifestation of supreme faith in God. Should we be unworthy of God's favor, we ask that He show us mercy for the sake of our ancestors who have displayed such loyalty and obedience as exemplified by the intended sacrifice of Isaac. This principle of the "Merit of the Fathers" (*Zekut Abot*) is often referred to in the services of the day. On the other hand, while the *Shofar* may be made from the horn of any clean animal, it should not be made from the horn of an ox or of a cow, because this might recall the incident of the Golden Calf, when Israel showed its weakness and lack of faith. The *Shofar* may not be painted in colors or decorated with foreign material, although it is permissible to have appropriate designs carved thereon. In size and in form the *Shofar* varies greatly. Six inches is the minimum length, although the average *Shofar* is from ten to twelve inches. Some have the simple curve; the Sephardim, however, favor one with the spiral curve.

Three distinct sounds are prescribed: *Teki'ah*, the plain deep sound; *Shebarim*, the broken sound; and *Teru'ah*, a wavering sound, consisting of a series of broken sounds. These three sounds are arranged in different ways, so that thirty sounds are produced during the morning service and thirty more during the additional (*Musaf*) service. In some congregations, forty additional blasts are sounded at the end of the service, making one hundred sounds in all. The blowing of the *Shofar* is done by one who is expert in the art (*Toke'a*) and the sounds are announced to him, one by one, by the rabbi or some learned man in the congregation (*Makri*).

The religious significance of the blowing of the *Shofar* on Rosh Hashanah has been elaborated upon by the rabbis

and medieval philosophers. Saadia Gaon enumerated ten purposes which the blowing of the *Shofar* should serve. Perhaps the most acceptable explanation of the ceremony was given by Maimonides: "Awake, ye sleepers, and ponder your deeds; remember your Creator and go back to Him in penitence. Be not of those who miss reality in their hunt after shadows, and waste their years in seeking after vain things which cannot profit or deliver. Look well to your souls and consider your acts; forsake each of you his evil ways and thoughts, and return unto God, so that He may have mercy upon you."

3

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

The reading from the Torah on the two days of Rosh Hashanah is taken from the Book of Genesis, chapters 21 and 22, respectively, which relate the story of the birth and the sacrifice of Isaac. The Hebrew designation for the latter story, '*Akedah* (binding), is the more correct, since Isaac was really not sacrificed, but only intended to be offered as a sacrifice. The theme of the story is repeated frequently in the liturgy of the holiday, both in prose and in poetic form, and the entire chapter is recited by pious Jews every morning in their prayers. This manifestation of supreme faith by our father, Abraham, his readiness to comply with what he believed to be a divine behest to bring his son, born to him in the twilight of his life and believed by him to have come in fulfilment of God's promise, as an offering to the same God, is invoked by us to avert the severe judgment that our deeds may merit. We pray that Providence deal with us in kindness and mercy for the sake of our ancestors whose devotion and obedience are

so strongly exemplified in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. "Abraham mastered his compassion for his only son in order to perform Thy will with whole heart; so in like measure may Thy mercy prevail over Thy stern and strict justice" is the tenor of the prayer accompanying the recitation of the story in the liturgy. This is the source for the theological idea of *Zekut Abot* (the merit of the fathers), the appeal made to God to deal mercifully with us for the sake of the implicit faith and obedience of the patriarchs, even if we ourselves are unworthy of considerations of mercy.

Although Abraham did not carry out his intention to sacrifice Isaac, his good motive should be accounted as if the act had been accomplished, for "the merit of good intentions is added to that of good actions," according to rabbinic teachings. Abraham's "readiness" to bring his only beloved son as an offering to God and Isaac's implicit obedience, so dramatically recorded in the biblical narrative, thereby manifesting the suppression of most cherished hopes in behalf of a high ideal, are appealed to as examples of the highest form of piety which should stand in good stead for their children after them throughout all generations. Abraham's intentions were not carried out, but the divine purpose was accomplished — Abraham stood the severe test to which his faith was submitted and that was all that God desired of him.

Besides the lesson which the synagogue derived from the story of the sacrifice of Isaac — the lesson of great faith and unquestioning obedience to the divine will — Bible students regard this narrative as a lesson that God does not desire human sacrifices. The custom of offering children to the deity was prevalent not only among the early Semites, but also among the Egyptians and even among the Greeks and Romans. The tragic story of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, who was slain to appease a goddess and

whose murder led to a series of assassinations in the family, has been immortalized in Greek drama and has served as a theme also for many a modern poet. Abraham in his great zeal for his newly-discovered faith may have felt that he should do that which was commonly accepted as the expression of the deepest faith — the sacrifice of a beloved child on the altar of the god. The biblical story seeks to stamp out that notion by telling us how Abraham's intention was frustrated by the intervention of God, thus establishing that the purer idea of God abhors human sacrifice in any form. Later legislators and seers took their cue from this story and denounced such a form of worship as abhorrent to the God of Israel. This was one of the great moral contributions made to mankind by the Jewish conception of God, at the time when idolatry, even in the most advanced countries of antiquity, still exacted its toll of human sacrifices.

While this may have been the original motive of the story, Jewish tradition is entirely justified in finding in it the noble example of devoted service and complete faith. This act of faith on the part of Abraham and also of Isaac, has served as a stimulus and as a comfort to the large hosts of martyrs through the dark ages when Jews were called upon to sacrifice themselves and their children on the altar of their faith. There is also logic in the fervent prayers of Jews, even at the present time, that this act of Abraham may deter God from imposing upon them the severe penalties that their perversities and sins might ordinarily merit. In prayer and in symbol this thought is emphasized; even the *Shofar* itself, made out of the horn of a ram, is to recall the '*Akedah*, that great act of faith of our father Abraham, which should act as a *Zekut* for his children to the end of days.

THE SYMBOLIC CEREMONY OF *TASHLICH*

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, a little before sunset, observant Jews congregate at the edge of a body of running water and recite the last verses of the Book of Micah, concluding with the sentence: "And Thou wilt cast all their iniquities into the depths of the sea." The seashore, a river or flowing brook, or even a well of spring water, may serve the purpose, but not a pool or any stagnant water. The later rabbis required that the water should have fish, which serve the purpose of reminding us that we are like the fish caught in the net, weak, helpless, and subject to the many ills that beset us in life. After the lines from Micah, and some additional prayers composed in more recent years have been recited, it is customary to shake the skirts of one's garments over the water, as if physically transferring the sins, which are figuratively supposed to cleave to one's garments, to the river or ocean so that they may be carried away and not be remembered. If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on a Sabbath, the ceremony is performed on the second day, although some authorities would permit its observance even on the Sabbath day. In some places the ceremony is performed, not on Rosh Hashanah, but on the sixth or eighth day of Tishri.

The symbolic nature of the ceremony is quite obvious. The consciousness of sin becomes very keen on the Day of Memorial and the regret for the commission of the sins rankles in the heart of every pious Jew. He hopes and prays that in deciding his fate for the coming year God will overlook his shortcomings and failings during the past year, which might stand in his way. By sending his sins away on the bosom of the ocean or the flowing stream, he figuratively expresses his desire that they might disappear

from the sight of God and might not serve as a deterrent in the way of his gaining the favor of Providence. We find occasional references in the Bible to the custom of holding prayer meetings at the waterside, and these references are multiplied in post-biblical literature. According to Philo, the shore of a river is a most appropriate spot for prayer, since this is the "purest place." Josephus quotes a decree which permitted the Jews of Halicarnassus "to have their places of prayer by the seaside, according to the custom of their forefathers." More pointed is the remark found in the *Zohar*, a Kabbalistic work of the thirteenth century, which says that "whatever falls into the deep is lost forever; it acts like the scapegoat for the absolution of sins." It is doubtful, however, whether the custom of *Tashlich* existed before the fourteenth century, as there is no mention of it in the Talmud or in any of the subsequent works to the time of the German rabbi, Jacob Mölln, who lived at the end of the fourteenth century. In his compilation of the *Minhagim* (Customs) of his generation and his land, Jacob Mölln mentions the custom of *Tashlich* and refers to the midrashic legend concerning the attempted sacrifice of Isaac. According to the legend, Satan, intent on thwarting Abraham's plan to follow the command of God and sacrifice his son, placed himself in front of Abraham in the form of a deep stream. Abraham and Isaac, nevertheless, plunged into the river and prayed for aid, whereupon the stream disappeared. While the sacrifice of Isaac is frequently alluded to in the prayers for Rosh Hashanah, the connection of *Tashlich* with this legend seems far-fetched. Nor are the various explanations offered by later authorities more convincing.

Purely symbolic in its origin, the ceremony has been given mystical meanings, and several superstitions have become associated with it. The custom of casting small

pieces of bread upon the waters as food for the fish is already mentioned by Mölln, who strove to discourage it. In the added prayers arranged for the occasion, reference is made to evil spirits (*kelippot*) created by the sins of the individual, which cling to one's garments and which should be shaken from them into the water. It was mainly due to these mystical elements of the ceremony that many have been opposed to its practice altogether and others tried to find in it traces of heathen superstitions. In ancient records, allusions are found to practices, prevalent among heathen peoples, of writing down one's transgressions on tablets and then casting these into the sea, or letting boats laden with small dolls or puppets, representative of sins or diseases, loose upon the waters and permitting them to drift away. There is no doubt that the ceremony of *Tashlich*, observed mainly by the Ashkenazic Jews, has no such superstitious notions connected with it. It is rather, a symbolic act emphasizing concretely the yearning to be cleared of sin and the hope that one may be forgiven.

Isaac Erter, one of the early *Maskilim* ("Seekers after enlightenment") of the last century, wrote a biting satire on the ceremony of *Tashlich*. He represented Samael, the head of the demons, together with a host of his underlings, watching at the edge of the river. The latter are provided with nets and are ordered to catch all the sins that fall into the river from the skirts of the rabbis, the pious men, the leaders and the wealthy men of the community. This gave Erter the opportunity to satirize the conduct of the leaders of the Galician Jewish community with which he was acquainted.

"OUR FATHER OUR KING"

In the liturgy of the Penitential Days and of the Fast Days, the prayer *Abinu Malkenu* occupies a prominent, even commanding position. It consists of a number of brief verses, all introduced by the words "Our Father, Our King," to whom the appeal is made. The rabbis related the story that in the time of a great drought, when the customary fast day was held, R. Eliezer b. Hyrcanus chanted the prescribed prayers for such an occasion but no rain came. Then R. Akiba came forward and exclaimed: "Our Father, Our King! We have no king besides Thee; Our Father, our King! Have pity on us for Thy sake!" and it began to rain immediately. Some inferred from this incident that R. Akiba was the author of the famous prayer, but it is very likely that the formula was much older than R. Akiba, although the number of prayers used with it, or their form, had not been fixed and remained in a fluid state for many generations also subsequent to the period of R. Akiba. Originally it may have had nineteen verses, to correspond to the nineteen benedictions of the *Shemoneh Esreh*, but already in the time of Amram Gaon (ninth century) the number had been increased to twenty-five. The Sephardic ritual has twenty-five verses, the Ashkenazic thirty-eight, the Polish forty-four and that of Salonica has fifty-three. Among the Ashkenazic Jews, this prayer is recited every day during the ten Penitential Days, as well as on all the Fast Days of the year, except Tisha b'Ab.

The idea of the Fatherhood of God is the direct result of the belief in God as the Creator of the world. The term "Fatherhood" was also used by the heathen nations of antiquity, but with them the implication was that the deity was the physical progenitor of the race, while in the Jewish

religion it only had a spiritual and moral meaning. The creation story would make all men children of God, made in His image, and later biblical writings recognized this idea, although they designated Israel as God's first-born. However, R. Akiba seems to have drawn a distinction between Israel and the other nations in their respective relationships to God, in the famous saying: "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of God, and it was a special token of love that it was made known to him that he was made in the image of God. Beloved are Israel, for they are called the children of God and it was a special token of love that it was made known to them that they were called the children of God" (Abot III.18). While all men, born in the image of God, have the capacity of rising to the stature of God's children in a spiritual sense, Israel, obedient to the Torah and loyal to the destiny assigned to them, are regarded as having reached that stage already. Some of the rabbis, however, would apply the appellation "son of God" only to the pious and upright among the children of Israel. The filial relationship with God is denied to those who stray away from the right path, be they Israelites or Gentiles; and the obverse would be equally true: that all who are conscious of the relationship and manifest it in their lives may designate themselves "the children of the living God." "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" is the exclamation of the prophet (Malachi 2.10), and it has become the slogan of all humanitarians throughout all generations.

God as King of the Universe is a figure taken from the social and political life of all peoples of antiquity. The king in ancient times was the embodiment of all authority. He was the lawgiver and the judge and to him all the people of his dominion owed unquestioned obedience and loyalty. God as the King of the Universe, who decides the fate of kings and of nations, was thus conceived of as the King of

kings, although that title was sometimes also claimed by some ambitious earthly rulers, such as the kings of Persia. The meaning assigned to this term in Judaism, in its development during the prophetic period, conveyed the notion of a moral order in the world and stimulated the hope for the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Indeed, already at the foot of Mount Sinai, Israel was declared a "kingdom of priests," ruled by the Author of the laws and regulations that would assure the prevalence of righteousness and purity of life among them. The intimacy implied in the figure of God's Fatherhood is enforced by the idea of His sovereignty, maintaining and demanding the strictest loyalty and submission to His laws. The two ideas are grouped together in another famous prayer recited on Rosh Hashanah:

Reveal Thyself in Thy splendor as King over all the inhabitants of the earth, that whatsoever hath been made may know that Thou hast made it, and whatsoever hath been created may understand that Thou hast created it, and whatsoever hath breath in its nostrils, may say, the Lord God of Israel is King, and His dominion ruleth over all.

In the daily prayers also, these ideas are combined in the petition:

Forgive us, O our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, O our King, for we have transgressed.

Even the stern king may be moved to mercy when his own son comes before him with a contrite heart and a humble spirit to beg for pity and forgiveness.

During the Ten Penitential Days, the idea of God's sovereignty finds greater emphasis in the liturgy, although God's fatherhood is often appealed to. On the days of judgment, as these days were conceived to be, God sits on His throne of justice and administers to all their deserts in

accordance with their conduct. Justice, however, is stern and rigid and the author of *Abinu Malkenu* prefers to put the appellation of Father ahead of that of King, thus endeavoring to secure for his people the compassion and love of the father for his children, lest justice deal too severely with them.

II

YOM KIPPUR (DAY OF ATONEMENT)

THE KAPPAROT CEREMONY

THE persistence of a custom which appeals to the masses, even though many of the best minds oppose it, is best illustrated by the ceremony of *Kapparot* performed on the evening preceding Yom Kippur. The custom consists in taking a fowl, usually a cock for males and a hen for females, and reciting certain prescribed passages while the following formula is pronounced:

This is a substitute for me; this is in exchange for me; this is my atonement. This cock (or hen) shall be consigned to death, while I shall have a long and pleasant life and peace.

The fowl is then ritually slaughtered and given to the poor, or eaten by the one performing the ceremony and its value distributed among the poor. It is preferable to use a white fowl for this purpose, in accordance with the simile in Isaiah: (1.18): "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." White, symbolizing purity, is taken as an assurance of atonement for sins committed.

This custom had its origin some time during the geonic period and met with great favor among the people, especially through the influence of the Kabbalists who elaborated it and surrounded it with many mystical ideas. Its primary purpose, of course, was to serve as a sacrifice in place of the sacrifices offered in the Temple. It is a sort of vicarious sacrifice, substituted for the prescribed offerings of the day which could no longer be practised after the destruction of the Temple. And it is for this very reason that many of the older legal authorities strenuously opposed it. Joseph

Caro, the compiler of the *Shulhan Aruch*, following some of the most prominent of the earlier authorities, said expressly that this custom should be abolished on the ground that it appears very much like a sacrifice, which must not be offered outside the Temple precincts. Other authorities, however, especially those who followed the mystical lore of the Kabbalah, upheld the custom but endeavored to eliminate from it any element that might in the least make it resemble the old sacrificial rite. Thus only chickens or geese may be used for this purpose, or even fishes or plants, but not pigeons or doves, since the former were never offered on the altar whereas the latter were. While a white fowl is to be preferred, one should not look for it, since this is a heathen superstition.

No matter what the origin of this ceremony was, as it was developed in Jewish history it has a very definite ethical and religious value. It was early associated with the distribution of charity, always regarded as one of the most important elements in obtaining divine mercy and forgiveness. In fact, very often the entire ceremony is performed with money, usually a multiple of eighteen, the numerical value of the word *Hai*, meaning life or living, and the money given to charity. The *Kapparah*, whether in the form of a fowl or of money, was made by every member of the household, including small children, even unborn babes. The day preceding Yom Kippur has always been a busy time for the poor of the community and for the various charitable organizations. In the vestibules of the synagogues, at the *Minhah* service, long tables would be set, on which were placed plates bearing inscriptions of the various philanthropic institutions of the community, and every person was expected to place his contributions there. On the streets where there were synagogues, hundreds of destitute persons stood in rows, ready to receive the gifts

distributed to them by the people going to and from the houses of worship. From a household containing a large number of members, and most Jewish families were quite large, considerable sums would be obtained as a result of the *Kapparat* ceremony. Chastened by the awe of the approaching great day, humbled in spirit and weighted down by the consciousness of sin, every individual sought means to establish friendly relations with his fellow men and in this way obtain approval and consequent forgiveness from God.

Another popular custom is observed on the morning of the eve of Atonement Day, when, immediately after the morning service in the synagogue, refreshments are provided for the worshippers and a spirit of fellowship and friendliness is encouraged. Each one begs the forgiveness of his neighbor for any intentional or unintentional wrong committed and, with handshakes and cordial greetings, all old animosities are forgotten and all personal grudges are buried. Some even go to the cemeteries and beg pardon from the dead for any grievances they may have against the living. This custom is in harmony with the rabbinic dictum that Yom Kippur holds out atonement only for sins committed against God, but sins committed against a fellow man will not be forgiven unless proper restitution is made and the pardon of the offended party is obtained. All these customs have had their high moral significance and left an impress upon the Jewish soul.

2

THE *KOL NIDRE* PRAYER

Prayers, even like books, have their distinctive fates. There is no prayer in the whole range of the Jewish liturgy that is as familiar, not only to Jews but also to Gentiles, as the *Kol Nidre* prayer, although it is hardly even a prayer.

The exalted and highly inspiring hymns and doxologies of the Prayer Book, many of them breathing a spirit of the noblest ideals and religious conceptions, are hardly known, even by name, while the *Kol Nidre* formula, in its origin probably nothing but a legal statement, has had a most popular appeal and is regarded with great reverence and awe. This is due primarily to its position as the initial paragraph in the service of the most solemn day of the year, and also to the plaintive and stirring melody which was given to it as early as the twelfth century.

The *Kol Nidre* is a declaration of an annulment of vows that may be made during the year in the heat of passion or excitement and then forgotten. Originally it applied to vows made in the year past, but it was later changed to refer to vows to be made during the coming year. The Sephardic ritual, however, still retains the earlier version. Opinions vary as to the exact time when this formula was introduced into the Yom Kippur ritual, and consequently several theories, some very attractive, have been constructed regarding the reason for its introduction. The early Babylonian geonim, of the eighth and the ninth centuries, were opposed to its recitation on the ground that it may lead some ignorant people to believe that after reciting the formula they could make vows indiscriminately and would not be required to keep them. R. Amram Gaon calls the custom of reading *Kol Nidre* a "foolish custom," although he was forced to include it in his famous prayer book, since it was already then in general use.

The annulment of vows is permitted by law, under certain conditions, when performed by a competent authority or by three learned persons acting as a court of justice. The feeling of awe in the presence of the great day, when the Jew prepares to pour out his heart before his Maker who sits in judgment over him and to pray for forgiveness for his sins, makes him anxious not to forget any sins which

require confession in order to be forgiven. A frequent sin was to make vows and then to forget them. In order to approach the day with a clear conscience, a formula, fashioned after the legal formula used in the annulment of vows, was devised and recited at the commencement of the great Day of Atonement. Because it is a legal formula, it could not be used on the holiday itself, and its recital therefore had to take place before the evening services, before sunset. Two versions of it are extant; one in Hebrew and the other, the more popular one, in Aramaic, the language used in those centuries by the common people in their daily intercourse, which points to its popularity from its inception. It was natural that in times of persecution by Christians or Mohammedans, crypto-Jews should apply the *Kol Nidre* to their own state, since they had to make vows to the Church that they abjured their former faith. Especially when Jews, remaining faithful to Judaism in secret, assembled in underground cellars or in some hidden nooks on the Day of Atonement, they first wished to pray that all the vows that they had made or would make under duress should be annulled, before they started the devotions of the day.

In spite of the fact that the rabbis repeatedly insisted that the *Kol Nidre* formula had reference only to vows that relate to the individual pronouncing them, involving no other person, Jewish converts and Christian anti-Semites have often used this prayer as an argument to disallow a Jewish oath as evidence in legal proceedings. In many instances a special oath was provided for Jews, *more judaico*, whereby the supposed absolution of the *Kol Nidre* was to be counteracted. Such an oath was in vogue in Rumania until about a generation ago. It was chiefly for this reason that the Reform ritual abolished the *Kol Nidre* altogether, while in many printed editions of the orthodox services the

paragraph is preceded by a statement that the vows absolved by the formula are only such as are of a personal character, affecting no one else besides the person who made them.

Even more obscure than the origin of the prayer itself is the origin of the touching melody that was given to it. Some seek its source in early Catholic chants, although there seems to be no good reason why it could not have been original with some obscure *Hazzan* whose genius provided a melody in conformity with the solemnity of the occasion. In most synagogues, the *Kol Nidre* is chanted three times by the *Hazzan*, beginning in a low tone and attaining greater volume when reaching the third time. During the recital several of the more prominent men of the congregation, holding Scrolls of the Law in their hands, are grouped around the reader and recite with him the introductory paragraph, which gives permission to the congregation to join in prayer with those who have transgressed the law or are under a ban of excommunication. This also was interpreted to refer to periods of persecution, when Marranos, who were officially members of the Church, came to the synagogue on this day to join with their brethren in worship.

3

CONFESSION OF SINS

Confession of sins is an ancient institution in Judaism. It is often referred to in the Bible as a means to expiation and atonement and is a necessary element in the process of repentance. The three essential steps in the process of repentance are: the recognition that a sin had been committed, the confession of the sin, and the determination that it shall not be repeated. When Nathan the Prophet

brought home to King David, by means of the famous parable, the enormity of his sin in taking Bathsheba, David declared his guilt in the simple phrase: "I have sinned before the Lord," and this was regarded as sufficient for the remission of the sin and for the removal of the punishment which would have followed the sin in the ordinary course. This idea is found also in other places in the Bible, where it is often said that a sincere confession accompanied by a change of heart is all that is required of man. The rabbis went a step further and said that the desire of a person to purify himself of his sins, as evidenced by his confession, would receive divine help. If man opens his heart only as much as the eye of a needle, God will help him to open it as wide as the gateway to the Temple hall. They also placed the repentant sinner in a higher category than that of the truly righteous, probably because it is more difficult for one inured to sin to make a change in his life and inhibit desires and passions to which he had yielded for a long time.

The simple formula: "I have sinned, transgressed and rebelled" was considered quite sufficient for confession. It is possible, however, that when one brought a sin-offering to the Temple for a certain definite transgression, the confession was more specific (Leviticus 5.5). Several forms of confession were developed in the course of time, some of which found their way into the liturgy. These confessions are probably of a very ancient date, some of them having been in existence before the rise of Christianity. The catalogue of sins enumerated in Romans 1.29-30, which contains twenty-two sins, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, is supposed by some to have been taken from an alphabetical confession of sins that was current among the Jews of that period. In the liturgy for the Day of Atonement we now have two such alphabetical lists of sins; one consisting of single words, and the other of

phrases, in double acrostic each one beginning with: "And for the sin which we have sinned before Thee." Based upon these formulas, there are a number of very elaborate enumerations of sins, the best known being the one recited by the pious Jews on the eve of the Atonement Day, just preceding *Kol Nidre*, which is also included in the long confession (*Viddui*) which one is to recite on the approach of death.

In spite of the importance of confession in Jewish life throughout history and the insistence made on confession as an indispensable step in repentance, we find nowhere that this confession had to be made in the presence of any other person. Sins committed against the moral or religious law, or, as the rabbis term it, "between the person and Heaven," can be atoned for by the sincere regret which is manifest in the confession made before God. Sins that involve the well-being of other persons will not receive atonement until full restitution is made to the person offended. During the Middle Ages persons whose conscience troubled them regarding their sins often resorted to the rabbis for advice and guidance as to how they might best make good the injuries they had done to certain individuals or to society. The punishments prescribed in some cases were sufficiently severe to discourage a person from ever again indulging in a similar sin. The trend of Jewish history, however, has been against the idea of seeking a mediator between man and God in matters pertaining to conscience, and the rabbi is no more authorized to prescribe remedies or absolutions than is any other individual in the community. The entire idea of mediation is foreign to Jewish theology in its normal development.

GABIROL'S *ROYAL CROWN* IN THE YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

The high priest, who had to perform the elaborate service in the Temple on the Day of Atonement, was kept awake the whole night of the sacred day when he had to rehearse the service and to be sworn that he would not deviate in the least from the prescribed ritual. The young priests were charged to keep him awake lest he should be inclined to slumber, and the prominent men of Jerusalem also remained awake so that the quiet of the night might be disturbed and the high priest kept from falling asleep. The custom of remaining the whole night in the synagogue, introduced in later times, is traced to this ancient usage, although the pious Jews who remain in the synagogue throughout the night indulge in a few hours' sleep on the benches or on the straw-strewn floor. It is, however, provided that only those who spend most of the night in prayer and meditation may sleep in the synagogue, while the *Hazzan* is warned not to stay up the whole night, as his voice might be affected by lack of sleep.

No prescribed ritual was arranged for the night, but in the course of time certain hymns and lengthy prayers became standard for the night's occupation. The responsive song, known as the *Song of Unity*, originally arranged for the different days of the week, is chanted in its entirety after the conclusion of the evening service. The favorite hymn recited during the night, however, is the majestic poem of Solomon ibn Gabirol, entitled *Keter Malkut* (Royal Crown) which is included in both the Ashkenazic and the Sephardic rituals for the evening. In the Schiff Library of Jewish Classics edition of a selection of Gabirol's poems, by Israel Davidson, with an English rendering by Israel Zangwill, this poem has 640 lines and extends over forty

pages. It is a poem most appropriate for the Day of Atonement, for which it was probably intended, although it may suitably be used at any time of the year and by an adherent of any religion, such is its universal appeal and its lofty conception of the relation between God and man.

The poem begins with an enumeration of the various attributes of God, each one elaborated in poetic manner, and interspersed with appropriate biblical quotations. From this, the poet proceeds to describe the greatness of God as evidenced in the world of natural phenomena, following the Aristotelean cosmogony which was the prevalent one in his time and for many centuries following him. The planets and the zodiac, the angels and the abode of the souls, are described in great detail in accordance with the best knowledge current throughout the Middle Ages. The errors which our poet makes in his astronomical data do not in the least detract from the majesty of the poetry and the religious emotions which it awakens. As Zangwill puts it: "Gabirol's chart of the celestial vault is of the same order as the Tuscan poet's (Dante), and his poetry in its esthetic aspect is as little affected by the inaccuracies of his astronomy — if indeed in these days of Einstein there is anything but a relative inaccuracy."

From the description of heaven, the poet comes down to a glorification of God's work in the creation of the soul and the body of man, which leads him to the thought of man's shortcomings and sinfulness, and to the recitation of the alphabetical roster of transgressions. Despite man's backslidings, God's mercy is always with him. Realizing the troubles and tribulations that are constantly harassing him, God does not "requite measure for measure to man whose sins are measureless." The poet is insistent on God's merciful attention to his prayer.

O my God, if my iniquity is too great to be borne,
what wilt Thou do for Thy great name's sake. And

if I do not wait for Thy mercies, who will have pity on me but Thee? Therefore, though Thou shouldst slay me, yet I will trust in Thee. For if Thou shouldst pursue my iniquity, I will flee from Thee to Thyself, and I will shelter myself from Thy wrath in Thy shadow, and to the skirts of Thy mercies I will lay hold until Thou hast had mercy on me, and I will not let Thee go till Thou hast blessed me.

Even these beautiful renderings of Zangwill do not do full justice to the incomparable magnificence of the original. The depth of religious feeling, the mystic yearning for communion with God, the exalted ideals of moral conduct, find here lofty expression in glorious sentences which stir the innermost soul and respond to the noblest and profoundest emotions of the human heart. The *Royal Crown* induces humility and stirs hope and confidence.

5

THE TEMPLE SERVICE ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

According to the testimony of the rabbis, the service in the Temple of Jerusalem during the Day of Atonement was the most impressive and the most solemn of the services of the year, all the details being performed by the high priest himself. The service described in the book of Leviticus was considerably elaborated in later times, so that a complete treatise of the Mishnah (Yoma) is devoted exclusively to the description of the functions and duties of the high priest on that day. The memory of this stirring ritual remained in the minds of the Jewish people long after the destruction of the Temple; the Mishnah was, therefore, able to reproduce the exact formulae of the service and the wording used by the high priest in the prayers which he offered while performing the sacrificial rites. An elaborate description

of the entire service is contained in the prayers of the day in all rites, known as the *Abodah*, which is included in the *Musaf* service.

The high priest began his preparations for his task seven days before the Day of Atonement. A substitute was provided for him against the eventuality of his death or incapacity to function on that day. During these seven days, the high priest performed all the duties in the Temple, so that he would be familiar with the various details of the ritual. The elders of the Sanhedrin were at his side and instructed him in the minutiae of the ceremonies. On the eve of the Day of Atonement, the elders of the Sanhedrin put him into the charge of the elders of the priesthood and exacted an oath from him that he would perform the rites without the slightest change or modification. This became necessary when the Sadducees arose and gained power, and when, as often happened, the high priest was one of their party. While administering the oath, both the high priest and the elders would weep; he because of the suspicion against his loyalty implied in the oath; and they because they had to entertain such a suspicion. He remained awake the entire night, which he spent in reading selections from the books of Job, Ezra and Chronicles or in having some one else read before him. It is related that long before dawn the Temple precincts would be crowded with people who came to witness the service.

First the priests went through the regular routine of offering the morning sacrifice, fixing the lamp and offering the incense. This was followed by the festival offering, consisting of a bullock and seven lambs. Then began the series of ceremonies peculiar to the Day of Atonement. The high priest offered up a bullock, purchased out of his own means. Laying his hands on the head of the animal, the high priest pronounced a confession of his own sins and of the sins of his household, and a prayer for atonement,

the formula of which is still preserved in our ritual. The ineffable name of God, the tetragrammaton, was then pronounced by him, and all the people, on hearing this, bent their knees and prostrated themselves and exclaimed: "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever." The rite of prostration is still performed in many synagogues at the present time.

The high priest then proceeded to offer the two goats, one of which was sent to Azazel by a special messenger, and the other designated as an offering to the Lord. He then returned to his bullock and made confession for the sins of the priestly family, pronouncing a formula similar to the first. The bullock was then slain, and its blood placed in a bowl and stirred by an attendant, while the high priest prepared a censer with incense and entered the Holy of Holies, where the censer was placed and the blood sprinkled once upward and seven times downward. He then returned to the goat set apart for the sacrifice and confessed the sins of the entire Congregation of Israel. The goat was killed and its blood was sprinkled by him in the Holy of Holies, while the portions of the goat and the bullock that were to be burnt on the altar were prepared for the offering. He later offered another goat and two rams as sin offerings. During all the service of the day, the high priest underwent five complete ablutions and ten washings of his hands and feet. He also changed his garments several times during the day.

The services in the Temple lasted the entire day, and upon their completion the high priest was met by his friends at a feast during which joy and mirth were dominant, in the confidence that pardon had been obtained. Our liturgy contains a prayer which the high priest is said to have recited after he had completed the service. This is followed by a glowing description of the personal appearance of the high priest after he had emerged from the Temple precincts

without a mishap. The description of the service is followed by a description of the feelings of grief of the worshippers because they no longer have the privilege to behold the glorious sight and participate in the service. A series of poems in alphabetical acrostic, narrating all that we have lost through the destruction of the Temple and fervently praying for its speedy rebuilding, concludes this part of the service.

6

“AZAZEL,” OR THE SCAPEGOAT

In the Temple service of the Day of Atonement, there was one ceremony that has caused considerable perplexity to scholars and Bible commentators. Two goats were placed before the high priest after he had confessed his sins and the sins of the priestly clan, in connection with the offering of a ram. He cast lots to decide which one of the goats was to be designated “for God” and which “for Azazel.” He then offered the goat upon which had fallen the lot “for God” as a sin offering, while the goat upon which had fallen the lot “for Azazel” was placed before him and, laying his hand on this goat’s head, the high priest confessed the sins of the whole Congregation of Israel. The goat was then handed over to a special messenger who was standing in readiness and who led it forth to a desolate place in the wilderness. According to rabbinic tradition, the goat was taken up to a high and rugged cliff, from which it was cast down as an atonement for the sins of Israel.

The word “Azazel” occurs only once in the Bible and its etymology is uncertain. In the Book of Enoch, Azazel is represented as the leader of the rebellious angels who came

down to earth and intermarried with the daughters of men, giving birth to the great giants who filled the earth with wickedness (see Genesis 6.4). This name also occurs in rabbinic literature to denote the rebellious angel, but in neither place is it associated with the ceremony of the Day of Atonement. Ibn Ezra suggests that Azazel was a desert demon to whom the primitive Israelites were in the habit of offering sacrifices of propitiation. In the Temple ceremony, however, this was purely a symbolic act, signifying that the sins of the people had been removed and forgiven. According to the description of the ceremony in the Mishnah, a scarlet ribbon was attached to the goat's horns. This ribbon was divided into two parts and when the goat reached the precipice, one part of the ribbon remained on the horns and the other was tied to the rock. It is recorded that during the forty years of the high priesthood of Simon the Just, the scarlet ribbon tied to the rock actually turned white, as an indication that the sins of the people were forgiven (see Isaiah 1.18). The transference of sins from men to animals survives in the ceremony of *Kapparat*.

The rabbinic interpretation of the term Azazel is perhaps the most acceptable. According to the rabbis, Azazel is nothing but a place name, a region in the wilderness. Perhaps the legend that the rebellious angel Azazel in the Book of Enoch was bound by the angel Raphael and chained to the jagged rock Duduael, which was identified as Bet Hadudo, about twelve miles from Jerusalem, caused the name of the rock to be known as Azazel. According to the description of the ceremony in the Mishnah, the messenger who led the scapegoat to the rock was accompanied by the most eminent men of Jerusalem and was welcomed on the road from specially constructed booths. No one, however, was present at the scene of the ceremony, when the goat was thrown down from the cliff. The completion of the ceremony was greeted by the people in Jerusalem

by the waving of kerchiefs and by great hilarity, in the hope that now their transgressions were entirely removed and forgiveness granted them.

7

KNEELING DURING PRAYER

Kneeling as an attitude during worship is often mentioned in the Bible. During the dedication of the first Temple, Solomon knelt while he pronounced his lengthy prayer of dedication (I Kings 8.54). Ezra knelt when he implored God for forgiveness for the Israelites who had taken foreign wives (Ezra 9.5), while Daniel is said to have knelt during his prayers three times every day (Daniel 6.11). The incident related (Judges 6.4–8) about Gideon's endeavour to reduce his army by selecting only such as lapped of the water with their tongues, rejecting those who knelt at the well to drink therefrom, is variously interpreted. The traditional interpretation connects this with the heathen custom of kneeling before the deity, so that Gideon inferred that those of his soldiers who knelt down to drink did it out of their habit of kneeling before the idol and he therefore rejected them. Other commentators explain the distinction on the ground that those who could drink while standing up were the more fit to face the battle. In the Temple not only kneeling, but also prostration was practised by the lay visitor as well as by the priests. While the sacrificial service was in progress the people in the courtyard would prostrate themselves each time that the *Shofar* was blown. Prostration, implying that the entire body was stretched out on the ground and the arms spread out, was in biblical times the attitude of homage to a king or to a superior, as in the case of Jacob when he met Esau (Genesis 33.3), or Ruth before Boaz (Ruth 2.10) and in many another instance.

In the synagogue the regular posture during prayer was either standing up or sitting down. Although the Hebrew word for bless or praise (*Barech*) is the same as the one used for kneeling and probably originated in that remote period when kneeling was the regular attitude at prayer, in the synagogue service kneeling is hardly ever mentioned. At certain intervals bending of the knee, or rather bending of the entire body forward, is prescribed. This is especially the case in the first and the eighteenth benedictions of the *Amidah*, and it is distinctly said that at no other time should the posture be changed from that of standing erect, with the feet close together, the eyes directed to the ground and the hands folded in front of the chest. A remnant of the older form of prostration is preserved in the custom of placing the head over the arm during the reading of the *Tahanun* prayer. In Babylonia, up to about the third century, this prayer was still recited in a prostrate position, but in modern days the laying of the head upon the arm, while sitting down, is the attitude followed in all the rites. It has been suggested that the adoption of the kneeling position during prayer by the Christian Church was the cause for its falling into desuetude among Jews, who endeavored to deviate from customs followed by Christians. It was even regarded as unseemly for a Jew to kneel at any time, even when not engaged in prayer, because it was so widely practised among Christians.

The prostration of the body, once on Rosh Hashanah and three times on Yom Kippur, is an exception to the general practice of the synagogue. It is preserved in orthodox congregations as a reminiscence of the Temple service, which is recounted with pathetic longing for its restoration.

MEMORIAL SERVICE ON YOM KIPPUR

The custom of offering prayers and vowing gifts to charity in behalf of the dead is prevalent among Jews throughout the world. There is no connection between this and ancestor-worship, since the very idea of praying for God's mercy for departed relatives implies that these relatives may be in need of mercy and forgiveness. These prayers were formerly confined to Yom Kippur and are still so confined in the Sephardic congregations, but in many of the Ashkenazic communities they are also said on the eighth day of Passover, on the second day of Shabuot and on the eighth day of Sukkot (*Shemini Azeret*). On Yom Kippur the memory of the dead is also recalled in many Ashkenazic communities by having large candles burning throughout the night and the day. The place of the memorial prayer in the services of the day varies. In most of the Ashkenazic communities it is recited in the morning, after the reading from the Torah, while in some Sephardic congregations the prayers are said on the evening of Yom Kippur.

The origin of the custom is unknown. In rabbinic writings there is only a single reference to the fact that atonement is extended on the day to the dead as well as to the living. In the Apocrypha (II Maccabees, 12.50-60) it is related that when Judah Maccabee searched for the bodies of some of his slain followers he found on them some idols worshipped by neighboring tribes; "then every man saw that this was the cause wherefore they were slain." Prayers were then offered for the atonement of the slain and Judah sent two thousand drachmas of silver to Jerusalem "to offer a sin offering . . . whereupon he made a reconciliation for the dead, that they might be delivered from sin." This, however, does not indicate any widespread custom, but rather a single act.

It is not unlikely that the custom of remembering the dead had its origin in the persecutions during the Crusades, when the names of large numbers of martyrs were inscribed in communal registers and were read in public one day in the year. It was natural that Yom Kippur should be selected for that purpose. We find that in Egypt the custom prevailed of mentioning the names of departed scholars and leaders of the community on certain occasions, and the Cairo *Genizah* yielded several such lists, some of which, including names of well-known personalities in Jewish history, have been published. This communal custom was later extended to include the remembrance of relatives by their descendants and survivors. In many congregations, after each individual has recited prayers in behalf of the souls of his own relatives, the *Hazzan* chants a prayer for the departed leaders of the congregation and also mentions the names of some outstanding individuals in other communities who may have passed away during the year. The popularity of the custom induced congregational leaders to make provision for such a service also during the other holidays when more people are able to attend synagogue services.

Various reasons have been assigned for the custom which requires that those whose parents are living should leave the synagogue while the memorial service is in progress. The most acceptable reason offered is that those whose parents are living would for the most part be young people who, having no interest in the service, would indulge in conversation and disturb the worshippers. There was probably also a superstitious belief that their presence might portend evil for their parents. For the same reason persons whose parents are alive do not repeat the orphan's *Kaddish* unless their parents granted them permission to do so. Under present conditions, when our synagogues are no

longer situated within ghettos, and the assemblage of a number of young people in front of the synagogue building or on its steps leads to unnecessary noise in the street, it might be wise to abolish this custom and have the congregation remain undisturbed during the memorial services.

The service itself, with its appeal to filial piety and its emphasis on the belief in immortality, is calculated to bring comfort and relief to the mourner. It is because of its powerful human appeal that this service, in a modified and often more elaborate form has also been preserved in the reform ritual of the Day of Atonement. The prayers added in more recent times include some of the appealing poems composed by the Spanish Jewish poets of the Middle Ages, which deal with reflections on the solemnity of death and the hope for a life after death. Beautiful poems and prayers written by more modern authors have been added to these. The contemplation of death and its inevitableness is likely to stir the spiritual element in man and make him realize the fleetingness of time and the need to cling to the more permanent and eternal values of life. The association of the present generation with the one that is past also stresses the inherent unity of the people and fortifies the chain of tradition whereby we are united with the past. The memorial service is a worth-while institution, because it preserves and strengthens family loyalties and emphasizes valuable religious truths.

9

THE BOOK OF JONAH

The reading from the Torah at the *Minhah* service of the Day of Atonement is followed by the reading of the entire book of Jonah, as the *Haphtarah*. The appropriateness of the

selection of this book for the Day of Atonement is quite obvious. A heathen people, given over to immorality and sinfulness, is aroused to repentance by the warning voice of a Hebrew prophet. Their cry of regret, their fasting and praying, prove acceptable to God and forgiveness is granted them. The force of repentance is demonstrated and its effect upon the divine will clearly established. The story thus offers comfort and hope to the worshippers, who have been spending the day in fasting and in praying, that they also will gain divine favor and their sins also will be forgiven, even as was the case with the people of Nineveh.

The incidents related in the Book of Jonah have offered many difficulties to Bible commentators and to theologians and served as the target for attacks on the Bible on the part of unbelievers and scoffers. The book, included among the twelve Minor Prophets, is of a nature quite different from the other eleven books. It contains hardly any prophecy; it is mainly a narrative, into which a prayer, more like a psalm than a prophecy, is inserted. The historicity of the book has been doubted on various grounds. Nineveh was for a time the capital of Assyria, but could have had no king of its own. It is contrary to the nature of historical narratives of the Bible to omit the name of the king, who is the hero of the story. Jonah is mentioned only in one other place in the Bible, in II Kings (14.25), where we read that Jeroboam II restored to Israel "from the border of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah, according to the word of the Lord, God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-Hepher." At that time, the city of Nineveh was still in existence, while in the book of Jonah it speaks of the city as having existed in the past, implying that at the time of writing it was no longer in existence, or at least, was greatly reduced in size. The miracles mentioned in the book, as the

storm on the sea and the fish swallowing Jonah and then releasing him alive, after keeping him for three days, also have been regarded as fantastic. For these reasons numerous theories have been advanced by biblical scholars as to the nature of the book and the purpose which it was intended to serve.

At the conclusion of the book, an episode is recorded which may give meaning to the whole narrative. When God announced His acceptance of the repentance of the people of Nineveh and His pardon for their misdeeds, Jonah seemed displeased. A large gourd sprang up beside his tent, which proved a comforting shelter from the sun. A little while later, the gourd withered, and Jonah fretted because of the sun beating down upon him. God then said to him that, if he was sorry for the gourd, that had such a brief existence, how much more should God feel sorry for the inhabitants of so large a city, containing more than twelve myriads of innocent people and also many cattle. God's mercy is not confined to Israel. It extends over all mankind, even over the brute creation. The universal character of the God of Israel is thus taught through a concrete story. This view of the story of Jonah was supported also by some of the rabbis in the Midrash as well as by some of the medieval Jewish commentators. Several modern Christian scholars elaborated this interpretation by making the main lesson of the book to be the duty of Israel to spread the idea of God's universality and mercy among all the peoples. "Israel had been entrusted by God with the mission to call the *goyim* also to moral amendment, and is not to look askance or be jealous if the *goyim* manifest repentance and if God takes back the threat which He had pronounced against them. . . . The Book of Jonah thus gives expression to those lofty thoughts which are uttered also by Isaiah." It is meant "to proclaim the universality of the divine plan of salvation, and to serve as a protest against the particular-

istic tendencies which now and then led many members of the people of Israel to narrow the boundaries of the divine kingdom of grace." (Koenig).

The author of the book may have had other purposes in mind in addition to the principal thought. One of these undoubtedly was to impress his own people of the House of Israel with the importance of moral self-examination and repentance and with the hopeful idea that God does not seek to destroy the sinner, but rather to uproot sin. The Ninevites were to serve a model lesson to Israel, that if a people so far removed from the Jewish conception of religion and morality could be stirred to a consciousness of sin, once their attention was directed to it, Israel, having been trained for centuries in the path of strict ethical life and of exalted religious ideas by prophets and leaders, should be much more responsive to the appeals of conscience and to the warnings of their spiritual guides than it had been. It is due to this secondary lesson which the book teaches that such an important position was assigned to it in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement.

10

THE NEILAH SERVICE

Three services are prescribed for every day of the week. On Sabbaths, New Moon days and holidays a fourth service, known as *Musaf*, is added. On the Day of Atonement, a fifth service is read which is designated as *Neilah*. The term literally means "closing" or "shutting," and the service was called by that name because it was said at the time of the shutting of the gates of the Temple, after the long service of the day was completed. Others, however, have inter-

puted it to refer to the closing of the gates of heaven, which stood ajar during the day to receive the prayers and supplications of the contrite and repentant sinners. The service thus assumed additional solemnity since it was regarded as the last opportunity for reconciliation and atonement. While the gates are being shut, the people, exhausted by fasting and praying all day long, make another supreme effort to penetrate the gates of mercy and obtain the favor of gracious Providence.

It is for this reason that the custom arose of having this service chanted by the rabbi or another pious and learned man of the community. The prayers often repeated during the ten days of penitence, in which the worshipper asks to be *inscribed* in the book of life, are changed during *Neilah* for the prayer to be *sealed* in the book of life. The idea behind the verbal change was that at the end of the day the fate of each individual is sealed and unchangeable. The ark is kept open throughout the service and the congregation remains standing. Even those who had to leave the synagogue during the day are careful to come back in time for this service, so that the synagogues are crowded at the exit of the great day as they are at the entrance of it, at *Kol Nidre*. There is also a revived enthusiasm among the worshippers, culminating in the ecstatic proclamation of the unity of God at the very close of the services. In many synagogues, a special sermon is preached before *Neilah*, in order to get the people attuned to the solemnity and spiritual exaltation of this closing service of the greatest day in the Jewish calendar.

Special tunes have been provided for the *Neilah* service which breathe hopefulness and confidence. The Sephardim have an introductory hymn, composed by Moses ibn Ezra. In many reform synagogues special hymns are chanted to the melody of this song. In the Ashkenazic service, a

departure from the minor key that predominates in all the services of the New Year and the Day of Atonement is introduced here, giving the chants a more cheerful character.

The long confession of sins, characteristic of all the services of the day is omitted at *Neilah*, only the shorter form being retained. Instead, however, two paragraphs of exceeding beauty and tenderness are inserted containing an appeal for forgiveness, since this is one of the attributes of God who desireth not the death of the wicked, but rather that he repent and return to God. The weakness of man, the shortcomings of even the wisest and most powerful of them are stressed; and this is offered as an additional reason for granting pardon to them. It appears that originally the *Neilah* did not form a distinct service and contained only this paragraph, and it was only through the influence of Rab, the organizer of Babylonian Jewry in the third century, that it developed into a complete and separate service.

The most impressive part of the service is its conclusion. After the final *Kaddish* is recited, the reader and the congregation jointly proclaim the unity of God by chanting in unison the *Shema*. Then the phrase: "Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever" is chanted three times, and finally the exclamation used by the people at Mount Carmel, when Elijah performed the miracle which confounded the priests of Baal, "The Lord He is God" (I Kings 18.39), is proclaimed seven times by the entire congregation. It is suggested by the Kabbalists that during the recitation of these pronouncements each worshipper should have in mind the determination that should he be called upon to suffer martyrdom for his faith he would be ready to submit to it without any hesitancy. The blast of the *Shofar* then declares that the day has come to a close.

YOM KIPPUR MELODIES

Unlike any other of the Jewish festivals, the ritual for the Day of Atonement provides for no special ceremonies in the home. In Temple times, the services were conducted almost entirely in the precincts of the Temple for the community as a whole, while the individual was given but a secondary place in the ceremonies of the day. When the synagogue took over the functions of the Temple, the responsibility of the individual became enhanced, although also merely as a member of the community. And so it has remained to the present day. The services of the day center around the synagogue, where every worshipper is expected to spend part of the evening and the whole of the day in communal worship and supplication.

It was natural that the cantors or readers should take advantage of the nature of the day and of the fact that the congregation is in no hurry to leave, to provide suitable melodies and chants whereby the services might be prolonged and beautified. There gradually came into being a traditional chant for both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which runs through the chief portions of the service and which has become almost universal throughout Jewry. This chant, in minor key, really constitutes the motif only, and various *Hazzanim* have permitted themselves to elaborate upon it or change it as they deemed fit. There are, however, a few melodies that are peculiar to Yom Kippur and that have had such a strong hold upon the people that even those who have introduced reforms into the service and have removed the Hebrew or Aramaic portions of the prayerbook, for which these melodies were originally arranged, still retain the melodies, but apply them to other selections in the vernacular.

The most popular of these melodies is, of course, the *Kol Nidre* chant. Many theories have been advanced as to the origin of this plaintive and charming melody, but none of these has been generally accepted. *Kol Nidre*, as is well known, is a legal formula by which certain vows made during the year become annulled through this public declaration. It is neither a prayer nor a hymn, and it is difficult to understand why such an elaborate chant was provided for it. A. Z. Idelson, who devoted his life to the study of Jewish traditional music, has the following to say on the subject: "The *Hazzan* was ordered to prolong the singing of *Kol Nidre* for two reasons: first, since it was not permissible to annul vows on Sabbaths and holidays, he would have to begin *Kol Nidre* by daylight, and then fill in the time till sunset; secondly, to enable also the late-comers among the congregants to hear the *Kol Nidre*, he would have to repeat it." The custom of saying *Kol Nidre* three times is probably older than the fourteenth century, although the tune was not fixed, varying in different communities until a much later time. Because of the ritual requirements, the *Hazzan* had to draw out the chant and improvise some tunes for the purpose, so that in the course of time this most beautiful melody was developed, and later generally adopted.

Another touching and popular melody is that used for the *Abodah* in the *Musaf* service of the day. The *Abodah* service depicts the ritual of the Yom Kippur Temple service. The high priest was the central figure in the imposing ritual and at certain intervals he would pronounce the formula for the confessions of his sins, of the sins of the priestly family and of the sins of the community. In the Mishnah Yoma, which is almost a contemporary record, these formulae are preserved, and there it is related that when the assembled congregation heard him pronounce the tetragrammaton, the only occasion when it was thus

pronounced, they would fall down and prostrate themselves in awe and trepidation. This scene is reproduced also in the synagogue, and although the ineffable name is not pronounced by the *Hazzan*, both he and the congregation prostrate themselves each time these words are said. The chant to which the text is set vividly reproduces the scene in the Temple, during the high priest's solemn performance of his duties. This chant is now almost universal in the Atonement Day services.

There is considerable divergence in the melodies for the prayers on the Day of Atonement between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic congregations. Perhaps the most popular melody among the Sephardim is the one used in connection with a hymn, beginning with the words *El Nora 'Alilah*, chanted just before the *Neilah* service. The hymn is the work of the Spanish Jewish poet, Moses ibn Ezra, and consists of eight stanzas, which are sung with much vim and gusto by all the members of the congregation. The tune is spirited and buoyant, and the manner in which it is chanted is indicative of the confidence of the people in the mercy of God who has listened to their prayers and has granted them all another year of life and health, of spiritual growth and religious progress.

12

MATCHMAKING ON YOM KIPPUR

The Mishnah (Taanit IV.9) records a curious custom that prevailed in ancient Palestine, probably during the days of the Second Temple, on the fifteenth of Ab and on the Day of Atonement. On these days, the daughters of Jerusalem used to go out in white garments which they borrowed from one another so as not to put to shame those who had none. They danced in the vineyards in the pres-

ence of the marriageable men there assembled, exclaiming at the same time: "Young man: Lift up thine eyes and see what thou choosest for thyself. Do not set thine eyes on beauty, but on good family. Grace is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." The young men would then respond: "Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (Proverbs 31.30, 31).

This tradition, related by R. Simeon b. Gamliel, was further elaborated by the later rabbis in the Gemara (Ta'anit 30b). They enumerated the various strata of society whose young women interchanged their white garments. The poor girls were provided by the kindness of those who possessed more than one dress. All the unmarried men repaired to the vineyards where the dances were held. The rabbis also suggested various slogans put into the mouths of those blessed with beauty, those who came from noble families, and even the homely and lowly. All of them had some alluring phrases which they chanted. Whether this ceremony led to many marriages was not divulged by the rabbis.

The tradition is introduced with the phrase: "There never were in Israel greater days of joy than the fifteenth of Ab and the Day of Atonement;" the joy derived from the immediate pleasure of the dances and from the prospect of marital unions that may have resulted from these occasions. The reason for such hilarity on the Day of Atonement seemed clear to the rabbis — it is a day of forgiveness and pardon. They were not quite so certain about the fifteenth of Ab; and the later rabbis advanced a number of reasons for the celebration on that day. One opinion has it that on that day both priests and people brought kindling wood for the altar in sufficient quantity to keep the fire burning through the entire year. Josephus refers to this day as the Feast of Xylophory (carrying wood). It has further been

suggested that the day, marking midsummer, was celebrated with bonfires, and dances in the vineyards were part of the joyous ceremonies of the day.

The same ceremony on the Day of Atonement, which appeared so simple to the rabbis of the Talmud, has led some modern Bible critics to interpret the original meaning of the Day of Atonement in quite a different manner from that with which it has been associated throughout the centuries. Together with other arguments based on biblical passages, or rather because of the lack of specific biblical authority for the significance of the day, this tradition is brought to the fore to establish the theory that originally the day was part of a series of hilarious celebrations accompanying the harvest. Its present meaning, they say, was not given to the day until after the return from the Babylonian exile.

If, however, we assume that these dances were held in the late afternoon of the day, it would be quite in keeping with other traditions which declare that after the high priest concluded his ministrations in the Temple on the Day of Atonement and the people gathered round about him were assured that pardon for their sins had been obtained, a great festival was arranged in which the high priest was the proclaimed hero. In connection with such a celebration, it is possible that the young people resorted to dances and merrymaking as described in the Mishnah. The later rabbis drew upon their imagination in an effort to fill in the lacunae in the old tradition.

The reading from the Torah in the afternoon about the forbidden marriages (Leviticus 18,1-30) fits in with this tradition (compare Megillah 31a and *Tosafot*).

III

SUKKOT (TABERNACLES)

SUKKOT — A SYMBOL OF THE WILDERNESS PERIOD

A NUMBER of references to the Feast of Tabernacles are found in the Torah; the historical significance of the festival is given only in Leviticus (23.43): "That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt." The original agricultural meaning of the feast is retained in all the references, when it is designated as the "Feast of Ingathering." After all the produce of the earth was safely deposited in the barn and the farmer was assured of sustenance for himself and his family during the approaching winter months, he felt happy and grateful to God for the bounties of nature and expressed his gratitude by observing the feast. All nations of antiquity kept the harvest festival; the characteristic contribution made by the Jews to this general holiday was the emphasis laid on the dependence of the farmer on God and the removal of the many obnoxious and immoral elements that featured its observance among the other nations. To the Jews, too, this was a joyous occasion, but the joy had to be shared by him with the poor and the dependent, and the manifestations of the joy were to be displayed in the presence of God, in the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.

The agricultural purpose of the festival is still retained in the ceremony of holding the four species of vegetation while reciting the *Hallel* and in the custom of dwelling in booths, the symbol of the hastily constructed home of the primitive shepherd and the later watchman on the farm. With the addition of the historical connotation, whereby

the festival was associated with the principal event in Jewish history, the exodus from Egypt, the symbol of the booth was enriched by the reference to the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness, the formative period of the Jewish nation, when they had to live the lives of nomads and be satisfied with these temporary dwellings. The Feast of Tabernacles, even as the other two pilgrim festivals, was thus connected with the exodus and made to serve as a memorial of the wanderings of the Israelitish tribes in the desert for forty years before they could enter the promised land.

The exact route of the march of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan has been a subject of dispute among Bible students, in spite of the fact that the narrative in the Book of Numbers (chapter 33), enumerating the various stations where they encamped, is given with definiteness. In that chapter, forty-two stations are mentioned from Rameses, the place of departure, to the bank of the Jordan opposite Jericho. In an earlier chapter (14.26-36) the reason for the delay in their occupation of Canaan is ascribed to the sin committed by the spies, sent by Moses to investigate the land, in presenting an evil report about the nature of the land and about the unusual strength of the inhabitants. The spies were away for forty days and the punishment decreed for their lack of faith was that they should wander about in the wilderness for forty years until the generation that left Egypt shall have died. Only Joshua and Caleb remained of that generation to enter Canaan, while all the others who were more than twenty years old at the time of the exodus died in the wilderness. It was during this period that the nomad tribes were gradually welded together into a nation capable of working in unison to attain the aim of reducing the land and making it their own. The distance covered by our ancestors in these forty years of wandering can now be traversed by automobile in six hours, but they needed the length of time, proceeding slowly, step

by step, and dallying in some places for days or months, or even years. The date of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai is fixed as the third month of the first year of the exodus and that of the erection of the Tabernacle as the first month of the second year. The many other incidents, including encounters with marauding enemy tribes, acts of rebellion against the authority of Moses and of Aaron and other events that the sacred chronicler saw fit to include, occurred during the period which served as a preparation for the assumption of national responsibilities under the provisions of the laws and statutes promulgated by Moses.

Thus, while Passover marks the liberation of our ancestors from the slavery of Egypt, and Shabuot the peculiar nature and destiny given to them through the revelation of the moral law, Sukkot commemorates the long period during which they were trained to give a proper estimate to the liberty which they had acquired and to perceive more clearly the national consciousness that their leaders sought to implant within them. The humble booth, ordained to serve as the home of the observant Israelite during the seven days of the festival, besides its original agricultural significance, was made the symbol of that most important period in the lives of our people, while standing at the threshold of their national existence, when their ideas and aspirations were moulded after the pattern set by the great lawgiver.

2

BUILDING THE SUKKAH

The only reference found in the Bible to the actual construction of the *Sukkah* is in connection with the religious reformation brought about by the activities of Ezra and Nehemiah, after the return from the Babylonian Exile. A

proclamation was issued to the people: "Go forth unto the mount and fetch olive branches, the branches of the wild olive, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.' So the people went out, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the broad place of the water-gate and in the broad place of the gate of Ephraim" (Nehemiah 8.15, 16). It is further related that the ceremony was observed by all the people who returned from the exile and the festival was celebrated in the manner unknown in Israel since the days of Joshua the son of Nun. "And there was very great gladness."

The law about the erection of booths is found only in Leviticus, although the name *Hag ha-Sukkot* is found both in Numbers and in Deuteronomy, while in Exodus the festival is designated "the Feast of Ingathering," pointing to the original agricultural character of the feast.

In later generations, the building of booths was regarded as obligatory upon every householder. It was one of the religious acts which people performed with much joy and alacrity. In many instances, the booth was built anew every year, although some would keep the same frame from year to year. The young people of the household usually undertook the labor connected with the construction, under the supervision and with the aid of their elders. There are no special provisions for the building itself except that it should be of convenient size and should have four walls. The walls need not all belong to the booth; a wall of a house or of a fence may be utilized. Great importance, however, was attached to the roofing. The roof must consist of branches of trees, detached from the trunk, sparsely spread over so that the stars may be seen through them. In the small Polish and Lithuanian Jewish towns, the peasants round about would do a brisk business in the branches

which they would bring to town for the use of the Jewish population. The olive and myrtle branches of biblical days were substituted by the branches of humbler trees that were plentiful in the particular vicinity. This flimsy covering was intended to indicate the ephemeral nature of the structure and thereby emphasize its symbolic significance.

While much of the material may have been brought together weeks before the festival, the actual construction did not start until after Yom Kippur. The devout Jew, weakened by a day of fasting and prayer, would repair immediately after the fast-day to place the first stake for the building of the *Sukkah*. Often the booth, built by inexperienced hands out of stray boards of all shapes and dimensions, would present a most ungainly appearance. The more opulent would have an elaborate frame, made by an artisan, which they needed only to put together for the festival. In some houses, special wings were set aside for the *Sukkah*, which may have been used for other purposes during the year. The roof was made movable and before the holiday it was removed or suspended and the branches were laid on top of the rafters made for that purpose. Such a room had to be either on the top floor of the house, or in a shed or bungalow built alongside of the house. The walls of the *Sukkah* were usually decorated with pictures and tapestries, in some cases kept for that purpose from year to year, while from the rafters fruit and flowers would be suspended. Many would transfer their finest linen and table silver, as well as ornaments of all sorts, to the *Sukkah* for the week of the festival. It is related that Queen Victoria once visited such a richly appointed *Sukkah* belonging to one of the wealthy Jews in London. On departing, the Queen laughingly remarked to the host: "I take your word for a great deal, but you cannot make me believe that your ancestors in the desert lived in such splendid booths as this." In the poorer neighborhoods, several families would join

in building a large *Sukkah* which would accommodate all the people of the vicinity, each family sitting at a separate table and indulging in an exchange of dishes with the other families. The housewives had to be on the alert in their culinary preparations, so as to forestall the criticism that might come to them from their sisters at the other tables.

From a home institution, the *Sukkah* has been relegated in western lands to the synagogue, serving the entire community, although many individuals still adhere to the ancient practice of having *Sukkahs* in their homes. The synagogue *Sukkahs* are often very elaborately decorated, thanks to the women of the Sisterhood who devote much energy and ingenuity to this task. Most of these *Sukkahs* are portable, dismantled every year and then put up again before the festival. The *Sukkah* of the Bevis Marks (Sephardic) Synagogue of London, used to be made in two parts, one richly decorated and well-equipped with flowers and precious ornaments and the other rather bare, covered with mattings and devoid of any furnishings. The former was for the members of the congregation, while the latter was open to strangers, mainly of Ashkenazic origin. Even the viands that were distributed were kept only for the inner circle and one had to prove his Sephardic origin to the all-powerful beadle by pronouncing some Hebrew word before he could aspire to partake of the refreshments that were served.

3

THE PALM-BRANCH

The *Lulab*, the palm-branch used among the four species of vegetation which the Bible commands every Israelite to "take" in his hands on the first day of Sukkot and, holding it,

to rejoice before God, is a branch of the date-palm which is indigenous to tropical countries. From the many allusions to the palm tree in the Bible it would appear that it grew in abundance in Palestine, although at present it is not so plentiful there. Jericho, which is designated as the city of palm trees, now has hardly any. The tree is very graceful, possesses rich foliage and produces luscious fruits. It served many purposes in ancient times. It afforded shelter from the scorching sun, its leaves and branches were used for covering houses and its wood for building, while its fruit was a staple article of food. The Bedouins still use dates as food, and the palm tree grows in many of the oases in the Arabian desert. Because of its usefulness, it was employed as a simile for the righteous man, and because of its gracefulness and beauty it served to represent comely women. It is probably also for the same reason that the palm branch was selected for use in connection with festive celebrations, as in the case of the observance of the completion of the harvest on the Sukkot festival. The carrying of palm branches in the procession at the rededication of the Temple by Judah the Maccabee and also, according to the New Testament, when Jesus entered Jerusalem further proves their frequent use on festive occasions.

The *Lulab*, to which are attached three twigs of myrtle and two willow branches, tied together with rings made of the palm strips, is held in the right hand and the *Eitrog*, the citrus fruit, in the left hand, during the recitation of the *Hallel* as well as during the procession around the *Bemah*, the reading desk which was usually in the center of the synagogue interior, when the *Hoshanot* prayers are chanted. The procession of the palms dates back to Temple times, and was probably in vogue before the Maccabean period. The priests would make the circuit around the altar every day of the festival, chanting: "We beseech Thee, O Lord, save now! We beseech Thee, O Lord, make us now to

prosper." On the seventh day of the festival seven circuits were made, each time repeating the chant, which became known as *Hoshana*, (O save, we beseech Thee). After the destruction of the Temple, the ceremony was transferred to the synagogue, although there are references to the fact that during the Middle Ages such circuits were made around the Mount of Olives by pilgrims to Jerusalem during this festive period. On the Sabbath which occurs in the week of the festival, the procession is omitted in the synagogue.

The *Lulab* was used in the *Hallel* service in the Temple. It was waved toward the four points of the compass, and upwards and downwards, thus making six distinct motions, thereby acknowledging God's sovereignty over all the corners of the world. Later Kabbalistic authorities attached numerous mystical meanings to the wavings made with the *Lulab*. According to the traditional usage, every Israelite is supposed to provide himself with a palm branch and practise waving it, as well as follow in the procession while holding it. When Jews moved to colder climates and the procuring of a *Lulab* involved many difficulties and considerable expense, several families would join in purchasing the *Lulab* and the *Etrog* and use it in partnership. One was not allowed to partake of any food before he had held the *Lulab* and pronounced the blessing over it. Although women are exempt from the obligation, Jewish women preferred to join in its observance. It became customary for the sexton of the synagogue to carry around the communal *Lulab* and *Etrog* to the homes of those who did not own one, thus giving the women an opportunity to hold it and pronounce the proper blessing.

4

THE MYRTLE AND THE WILLOW

The law regarding the four species of vegetation that are to be used on the first day of the festival of Sukkot is found in Leviticus (23.40), but not in Deuteronomy. The directions are not very explicit, "And ye shall take you on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and boughs of thick trees and willows of the brook, and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days." Tradition identified the "fruit of the goodly trees" with the citron (*Etrog*) and the "boughs of the thick trees" with the myrtle, although the text itself gives no intimation as to which trees are meant here, while the myrtle, although some species of it are found in Palestine grown to the height of eight and even of twelve feet, can hardly be designated a tree. The Karaites interpreted this text as referring to the decorations of the *Sukkah*. This interpretation is also adopted by some modern Bible critics (compare Nehemiah 8.15-16). But tradition makes of this a separate ceremony and this has been the manner in which the passage has been understood throughout the ages.

The myrtle (*Hadas*, from which the proper name of Hadassah for Esther is derived) is found in Palestine and the Lebanon district in a number of varieties and is often mentioned in the Bible. It was a favorite plant, which was used on all festive occasions, especially at weddings. Myrtle leaves were made into garlands which adorned the bridal canopy while the students would dance before the bridal couple with myrtle branches in their hands. In the Middle Ages, we find the custom of crowning the "Bridegroom of the Law" on Simhat Torah with myrtle wreaths. In Babylon, some preparation of myrtle and other spices was used on the occasion of a circumcision ceremony, while a mixture of wine and myrtle sap was used at the ceremony of

the Redemption of the Firstborn. On the Sabbath after the wedding, the bridegroom wore a garland of myrtles, and in Paradise, it was said, roses and myrtles abound and the righteous souls carry branches of myrtles in their hands. When Isaiah sought to give expression to his ecstatic vision of the future redemption and the march of the exiles back to their homeland through the desert, he saw the wilderness changed into a pool of water and the dry land into springs of water, and he heard God saying: "I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia-tree, and the myrtle, and the oil-tree" (Isaiah 41.19). In another place, the prophet grows enthusiastic about the joy with which nature will welcome the redemption of Israel. "And all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle" (Isaiah 55.13).

In a homiletic *Agada*, the myrtle is regarded as resembling the eye and its use in the service atones for the sins that are the results of the lust of the eyes. The pious people who are careful in the observance of all the minutiae of the law but are not engaged in the study of the Torah are compared to the myrtle which has fragrance but no taste. The myrtle leaves were used in the spices prepared for the *Habdalah* on Saturday evening. R. Johanan said that a scholar who refuses to impart his knowledge to others is like a myrtle in the desert, the fragrance of which is enjoyed by no one. The *Agada* as well as the liturgy for Sukkot saw numerous allusions to the patriarchs and the saints of ancient times in the various properties of the myrtle.

The humbler member in the combination of the four species is the willow of the brook. It grows in abundance along any body of water and is especially in evidence on the banks of the Jordan. In ancient times, the people of Jerusalem would bring large bundles of willows from

Mozah, a short distance away, but more recently Arabs have brought them in baskets from Hebron and other places and sold them to the pious Jews. In Temple times, the altar was decorated with willows on the festival, while the procession of the people with their *Lulabim* and accessories moved round about it, chanting the word *Hoshana* (Save, I pray Thee). The refrain was later adopted as the name of the willow itself and we still speak of the seventh day of the feast as Hoshana Rabba, when the willow is beaten until its leaves fall off. This is supposed to symbolize the belief in the resurrection, although other meanings have been given to it by the Kabbalists and folklorists.

In the rabbinic simile, the willow represented the type of people who neither study the Torah nor practise good deeds. However, by being combined with the pious and the learned (typified by the *Etrog*), the learned though not pious (typified by the *Lulab*), the pious and not learned (typified by the myrtle), they also will be accorded God's favor. In the union of all the various elements of Israel, the deficiencies of one kind are supplied by the others.

Because the leaves of the willow resemble the mouth, its use in the services is expected to atone for such sins as result from speech. Many other symbolic meanings were found by the rabbis in this humble plant which has been exalted to the position of honor among the other plants of more distinguished type in the ceremonies connected with the process of praising God for the blessings of the harvest, which the festival of Sukkot has as its main purpose.

5

THE HALLEL

Psalms 113–118 constitute a unit by themselves and have from very early days been used as psalms of thanksgiving and praise on special occasions. The name *Hallel* (Praise)

was given to the collection already in the Mishnah and in order to distinguish this from Psalm 136, which uses the refrain "for His mercy endureth forever," and which is known as the "Great *Hallel*," the collection of Psalms 113-118 is called the "Egyptian *Hallel*," because of the frequent references made therein to the exodus. The authorship and the date of these psalms are subjects of debate among scholars, some placing their composition as early as the return from Babylon, while others postpone it to the Maccabean period. The rabbis believed that the *Hallel* was first recited antiphonally by Moses and the children of Israel after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea. A famous rabbinic legend narrates that when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea unscathed and the Egyptians met their doom there, the angels became so elated over the occurrence that they burst out with the chant of the *Hallel*. They were, however, quickly silenced by God Himself, who said: "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you would sing My praises?" The touch of tender mercy for all God's creatures, so characteristic of the teachings of Judaism, is most beautifully expressed in the simple legend.

In the synagogue, *Hallel* is recited on the three pilgrim feasts, on the eight days of Hanukkah and on all New Moon days, except that of Tishri, which coincides with Rosh Hashanah. Although the reading of the *Hallel* is avowedly a rabbinic regulation, a blessing precedes it, concluding with the words "who commanded us to read the *Hallel*." On New Moons and the last five (six) days of Passover some sections are omitted and the group is then designated as "half *Hallel*." It is not said on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the solemn days of judgment, nor is it said on Purim, since the incident celebrated then occurred on foreign soil.

Hallel is also chanted at the Seder table on Passover and in some rites it is also sung in the synagogue on the first two

evenings of Passover. The close association of these psalms with the exodus is emphasized in Psalm 114, which begins: "When Israel came forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language." It is, however, during the festival of Sukkot that the *Hallel* occupies a central position in the synagogue liturgy. The four species of vegetation — the palm branch, the citron, the myrtle and the willow — are held together during the chanting of the *Hallel* and at certain periods the *Lulab* is waved in different directions. This ceremony is repeated every day of the seven days of the festival, except on the Sabbath, when the *Hallel* is recited without the ceremony of holding the "four species." On the eighth and ninth days the "four species" are discarded, but the *Hallel* is said.

The structure of these psalms is of varied beauty and exquisite imagery. Most of them were probably recited in responsive form by the reader and the congregation and some of the verses are still said antiphonally in the synagogue. It is especially during the chanting of these responsive strophes, such as "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever," or "We beseech Thee, O Lord, save now! We beseech Thee, O Lord, make us now to prosper!" that the *Lulab* and *Etrog* are waved in the four directions as well as upwards and downwards to a very touching tune. Primarily hymns of thanksgiving for Israel, the collection also contains many thoughts of universal significance. Psalm 117, consisting of only two verses, the shortest chapter in the entire Bible, rings out with a call to all the nations of the world to join in the songs of thanksgiving with Israel. "O praise the Lord, all ye nations; laud Him, all ye peoples. For His mercy is great toward us; and the truth of the Lord endureth forever. Hallelujah." In these few lines, Israel is made to recognize his true destiny, that of serving as the messenger of God to

all the children of man. Thanking God for his own redemption, for his national release from slavery, the Jew is exalted through these songs to seek the benefits of his heritage, of the eternal moral and religious verities entrusted to him, for all humanity, who will eventually come to recognize with him the great blessings of a pure religion and an exalted morality.

6

SUKKOT AND THE PRAYER FOR RAINFALL

When the Germans swooped down upon Poland on September 1, 1939, with their highly mechanized war machinery, the newspapers reported that Poland was praying for rain which, it was hoped, would render the roads impassable for the German armies and halt their precipitous assaults. This was quite different in purpose from the farmer's prayer for rain to enrich the soil and to fructify the seeds that he placed in it. Prayers for rain, as well as elaborate ritual ceremonies that usually accompanied them, were quite common among all peoples of antiquity and even of more modern times. The dependence of the soil upon rain and the feeling that all such blessings are the direct gift of God, or of the gods, caused the tiller of the soil to turn heavenwards in times of drought and offer up his prayer before the Almighty. The modern Poles simply followed an old custom although their purpose was quite different. It is interesting in this connection to note that in ancient Judea the actual prayer for rain was not offered until sixty days after the Sukkot festival, so as to permit the pilgrims, who spent the holiday in Jerusalem, to return to their homes before the roads became difficult of passing because of the rains.

The rabbis declared that Sukkot was the period when the world was judged regarding rainfall. It was in connection with this belief that the elaborate ceremony of the drawing of water was enacted every day of the festival in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Mishnah describes this ceremony in most colorful style and the later rabbis declared that he who has not witnessed the festivities in connection with the water libations on Sukkot has never seen real joy. One of the *Tannaim* complained that he was unable to get any sleep during the week of the festival on account of the hilarity and the illuminations in the neighborhood where he lived in Jerusalem. In later times, after the destruction of the Temple, the ceremony of the drawing of water could not be literally carried out, but assemblies were arranged in the synagogues for every evening during the week when psalms and chants were sung and refreshments were partaken of. The main prayer for rain has been shifted to the last day of the festival, Shemini Azeret.

Bible commentators and archeologists have indulged in numerous speculations as to the origin and the chief purpose of the Sukkot festival. In the Bible, the feast is designated as the "Feast of Ingathering," celebrating the conclusion of the harvest season which began with Passover, included Shabuot and reached its climax on Sukkot when all the produce of the field and of the orchard was safely stored away in the barn and the farmer was assured of his sustenance for the year. In the book of Deuteronomy (16.13), the festival of Sukkot is associated exclusively with the conclusion of the harvest season, while in Leviticus (23, 42, 43), the reason for dwelling in booths on the festival is associated with the wanderings of the Israelites through the wilderness where they had to dwell in tents. Of course, any other days of the year could have been set apart for commemorating the historical event, but the fifteenth day of

the seventh month had already been observed as a festival in primitive times and it was simple to attach new significance to an old festival whereby it was enriched and made more meaningful.

In his work on the Pharisees, Professor Finkelstein evolves the theory that the association of the Sukkot festival with prayers for rain originated among the traders and artisans of Jerusalem who, at this season of the year, when they saw their cisterns getting low in the supply of water, looked forward to the rain to fill them up again and provide a supply for the rest of the year. While "the men of Sharon and Jezreel might rejoice in the crops of the past year, the men of Jerusalem were thinking of the rainfall of the morrow." He thus makes the Pharisees the originators of all the customs connected with the drawing of water which were opposed by the Sadducees who saw in such innovations a reversal of the original intention concerning the observance of the festival. The theory is not quite convincing and is very laboriously made to fit in with his general proposition regarding the social relation between these two sects in ancient Judea. Although the rainy season did not start until the following month, it was natural for the Pharisaic leaders to turn the pilgrim festival into a season of prayer and ritual for the rainfall that was expected to come and for which both farmer and city dweller so ardently waited and hoped. While the rabbis designated Sukkot as a day of judgment regarding rain, the joyous ceremonies, described so fully in the Mishnah, that accompanied the drawing of water is hardly indicative of fear and apprehension as days of judgment are. It was only in later times that the service on Shemini Azeret was given that solemn tone which is characteristic of prayer for something so keenly desired as rain. The melodies used for the *Geshem* service are in a minor key like that on the High Holy Days, and the *Hazzan* dons the white gown which is worn by him on Rosh Ha-

shanah and Yom Kippur. In spite of the solemnity of this service, the rest of the day is observed with many parties and hilarious entertainment culminating in the joyous celebrations of the last day, Simhat Torah. It is, therefore, rather strained to say, as Professor Finkelstein does, that "for the Pharisees it was the season of sacrifice, prayer and water-rites; for the Sadducees it was the feast of ingathering and nothing more."

7

HOSHANA RABBA

There is a curious anachronism in the New Testament which causes considerable trouble to Christian theologians and exegetes. In Matthew, chapter 21, it is related that when Jesus with his disciples arrived in Jerusalem he was met by a great multitude, many of whom spread their garments on the road and others cut branches and strewed them. "And the multitude that went before, and that followed cried, saying Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." The same story is repeated with slight variations, in Mark and in John. This formula, based on Psalm 118.25, 26, was the regular formula which the people used during the feast of Tabernacles while marching with the palms and citrons around the altar. As Jesus's arrival in Jerusalem was during the week preceding Passover, it is rather perplexing to find that the greeting used on another occasion should have been transferred to the spring period. Hence, some Christian scholars regard this as an anachronism or a conscious, arbitrary transfer of the custom of Tabernacles to the Passover holiday. The institution of Palm Sunday, preceding the Easter holiday in the Christian Church, is based on this confusion of the two festivals.

The word *Hosanna*, which has become part of the English language with the meaning attached to it in the Gospels, is, of course, a Hebrew word, which means, "Save, I pray Thee." As it was used in the Temple and in the synagogue it implied a prayer rather than an exclamation of exultation. The formula was repeated each day of the first six days of Tabernacles while the people marched with their palms and citrons around the altar and seven times on the seventh day. Hence the seventh day of the feast came to be known as Hoshana Rabba (The Great *Hosanna*). Because on that day each one also held a twig of the willow in his hands, the willow itself came to be known as *Hoshana*. It is curious to note that in the early Christian literature, Palm Sunday is known as "Hosanna Sunday," or "Day of Hosannas," or simply "Osanna." In the synagogue, a series of hymns has grown up, which are recited during the processions with the palm branches around the *Bemah*, all having the refrain of *Hoshana*, and therefore known as *Hoshanot*.

The Kabbalists attached another significance to the day of Hoshana Rabba, for which some reference has been found in early rabbinic literature. It has become an established belief that the final decree regarding the fate of each individual for the coming year, is promulgated on Hoshana Rabba. In the *Zohar*, the belief is given concrete expression. Judgment begins on Rosh Hashanah, when the righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life and the wicked in the book of death. Average people are given the opportunity to repent until the Day of Atonement, when their fate is sealed. However, another extension is permitted to some of the stragglers until Hoshana Rabba, when the decree is finally promulgated on properly executed documents. If one is unable to see his shadow on the night of Hoshana Rabba he is certain to die during the year, al-

though it is related in one of the most popular medieval works (*Sefer Hasidim*) that one who did not see his shadow on the night of Hoshana Rabba and thus expected to die that year, began to fast and pray and had a number of his friends also fast and pray in his behalf and distributed large sums to charity, and he lived for many years after that. It became a custom to spend the night in reading the books of Deuteronomy, Psalms and selections from other parts of the Bible, the Mishnah, and especially from the *Zohar* and a number of Kabbalistic prayers and supplications. During the morning services, the *Hazzan* is dressed in white just as on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and uses the same chants as are used on those days. However, the joyousness of the season may not be interfered with. During the night, while the people are assembled in the synagogues to recite special prayers that have been collected in a book entitled *Tikkun Lel Hoshana Rabba*, refreshments are served and certain joyous songs are interspersed. During the services in the morning the extra twig of willow is struck until all the leaves fall off. This ceremony has been explained as expressing the hope of resurrection and of the coming of the Messianic age.

8

SHEMINI ATZERET

The concluding day of the Sukkot festival is designated in the Bible and in the liturgy as Shemini Atzeret, usually rendered "the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly." In a homiletic way, the rabbis explained the nature of the day by means of the following parable: "A king once gave a feast to which the diplomatic representatives of many nations were invited. The feast lasted for seven days. When they were all ready to depart, the king called aside his son

who was also among the guests and said to him: 'While all these strangers were around we hardly had an opportunity to have an intimate conversation. Tarry thou one day longer, when we shall hold a simple feast all by ourselves.' Thus, God arranged for the feast of Sukkot when seventy offerings are made in behalf of the seventy nations of the world. On the conclusion of the feast, He begs of Israel to tarry (*azar*, hold, keep back) one day longer when only one bullock and one ram are offered in behalf of Israel." In its literal sense, however, this day is called thus because it serves as the conclusion to the holiday, as is also the name given to the last day of Passover. Shabuot is likewise called Atzeret, and is regarded as the concluding day of the Passover holiday. This again is explained by the rabbis in the following manner. Atzeret of Sukkot should really be observed on the fiftieth day after the holiday, as is Shabuot on the fiftieth day after Passover, but because the rainy season begins just about this time, the people were excused from the trouble of travelling to Jerusalem then, and the feast was set for the day immediately following the conclusion of the Sukkot holiday.

The most distinctive feature of the festival as observed in the synagogue has been the chanting of a special prayer for rain, recited during the *Musaf* service. This is known as *Geshem* (rain) and the prayers compiled in this connection are chanted with a peculiar intonation, while the *Hazzan* is clothed in a white gown similar to that worn on the high holy days. The rainy season in Palestine begins about this time and the farmer waits for it with hope and faith. During the holiday, the thousands of pilgrims who would come to Jerusalem from all over Palestine, most of them farmers, would watch anxiously the drift of the smoke from the altar in the Temple. If it drifted toward the north, they looked forward to plenty of rain, while if it turned toward the

south they were apprehensive that the rain may be scarce. After Shemini Atzeret, a phrase expressive of the power of God in causing the rain to come down in its proper season, is inserted in the *Shemoneh Esreh* and recited until the first day of Passover. The actual prayer for rain, however, inserted in the ninth benediction, is not said until much later, at the autumnal equinox, about December 5th, out of consideration for the pilgrims who were given time to return to their homes before the rain started. Prayers and fasting for rain to come down were also said and practised during other periods of the year and the Mishnah has a special treatise set aside for the consideration of the various laws regulating these customs. Already in Temple times, we are told that the high priest, while performing his arduous duties on the Day of Atonement, invoked God to send rain in due season. Drought was regarded as a punishment for sins and in the *Shema*, the rewards and punishments enumerated for the obedience or disobedience of the commandments of the Lord were mainly the coming of rain in the proper season or the withholding of the rain when it was most needed. The prayer for rain proved efficacious when offered by pious and virtuous men. Teachers of children were selected for that office because of their exalted calling. The rabbis mention a personality, Honi ha-Maagal, who appeared to be most successful in having his prayers for rain answered.

The special prayer for rain said on Shemini Atzeret, takes into consideration the climatic needs of Palestine. The custom has been maintained also after the exile when Jews lived in other countries and in different climes. When a number of Spanish exiles settled in Brazil in the middle of the seventeenth century and found that the rainy season there came at a different time of the year, they turned to a rabbi in Salonika to inquire whether they would be justified in changing the recital of the prayer for rain from the

winter to the summer months. This interesting question is the first recorded legal inquiry directed by Jews of the New World to those of the Old. While this was permitted to them, the *Geshem* prayer on Shemini Atzeret still remained in vogue, as this was intended to serve not merely as a prayer but also as a historic reminiscence of the indissoluble relationship of the Jews with the soil of Palestine. The special prayer is found in one form or another in all the different rites, the Sephardic as well as the Ashkenazic. In the latter ritual, a considerable number of additional *piyyutim*, describing the agricultural works to be pursued during each month of the year, each one influenced by the signs of the Zodiac peculiar to it, are inserted. The crude illustrations of the signs of the zodiac may still be found in some of the older Ashkenazic festival prayer books.

9

SIMHAT TORAH

The ninth and last day of Sukkot, designated as Simhat Torah, the Rejoicing of the Torah, or, more correctly, the Festival of the Torah, is known in the liturgy and in talmudic literature merely as the second day of Shemini Atzeret. In the course of time, however, this last day of the festival assumed added meaning by associating it with the annual reading from the Torah in the synagogue. The annual cycle of readings from the Torah began on the Sabbath following the Tishri holidays, when the first section of Genesis was read, and concluded with the reading of the last portion of Deuteronomy on the last day of Sukkot. The conclusion of the readings from the Torah was then made an occasion of festivities and merrymaking, which gave a new character to the day and even suggested a new name for it.

In the evening, all the scrolls are taken out of the ark and carried in procession (*Hakkafot*) around the *Bemah*, the reading-desk in the middle of the synagogue. Appropriate songs and hymns, expressive of joy and gratitude for the gift of the Torah, are chanted by the cantor and his choir during these processions. The children in the congregation are encouraged to participate in the marching and the singing, while carrying small flags with characteristic Hebrew inscriptions and with candles or torches attached to them. The honor of carrying the scrolls is distributed among the members of the congregation, so that often the circuits have to be multiplied in order to afford an opportunity to every worshipper to take part in the ceremony, thus prolonging the service until late in the night. The reading of the Torah follows, the only occasion when the Torah is read in the evening. Among the hymns chanted on this occasion is the famous song which depicts the scene in heaven when Moses was about to take the Torah down and the angels marvelled at the appearance of a mortal in their midst. A splendid English translation reproducing not only the thought but also the cadence and rhythm of the little poem was made by Israel Zangwill and is included in the London edition of the *Machzor*.

In order to indicate that we really never stop our study of the Torah, an interesting ceremony was made part of the morning service of the day. After the last section of Deuteronomy is read several times, to give opportunity for every worshipper to be called up and pronounce the blessing for the Torah, the first section of Genesis follows immediately. It was always esteemed a special distinction to be called up to the reading of the last section of Deuteronomy or of the first section of Genesis. The one called up to the conclusion of Deuteronomy is known as *Hatan Torah* and the one called up to the beginning of Genesis is known as *Hatan Bereshit*. The two men thus signally honored

usually made generous contributions to the congregation and often invited all the members of the community to banquets which they had arranged in their homes. In England it has been customary to announce the names of the honored individuals before the holiday in the Jewish press. In other countries the custom prevailed of auctioning off honors connected with the reading from the Torah during the Sabbaths of the year on Simhat Torah and the persons who purchased these honors were at liberty to bestow them upon any one they desired.

Considerable laxity was permitted in the synagogue on this day. Fruit and candy were distributed to the children who were permitted to eat them in the synagogue proper. This was the only day when women were not excluded from the lower floor of the synagogue, and drinking and merry-making proceeded in the synagogue building without interference. Pious Jews would dance in front of the processions with the scrolls, and children would fire salutes as a sign of rejoicing. The narrow confines of the Jewish quarters in the towns of Eastern Europe presented a gala appearance on that day. Not only the student of the Law, but also the ones who contributed toward the support of educational institutions or who merely observed the precepts of the Law, felt free to share in the general festivities. Groups of people of all elements of the population could be seen promenading on the streets, some conducting the rabbi with songs and chants to the synagogue, others following the *Hatan Torah* or the *Hatan Bereshit*, while still others abandoned themselves to excessive hilarity under the influence of the spirit of the day. Children were permitted to dismantle the *Sukkahs* and to set the material on fire, thus having bonfires illumine various parts of the town. It was in this manner that the festive season was brought to a close by the medieval Jews, and much of the same spirit of joyousness is still preserved in many Jewish communities of the present time.

IV

HANUKKAH (FEAST OF DEDICATION)

JUDAISM AND HELLENISM

THE penetration of the armies of Alexander the Great into Asia Minor in the early years of the third century before the present era brought about a more intimate relationship between the civilization of Greece and the cultures of the Orient. The victorious Greeks naturally superimposed their modes of life, thought and speech upon the conquered nations and tribes and in a short time the Greek language became the speech of the upper classes and even found its way into the vernacular of the lower strata of society. New cities bearing Greek names were formed and the old names of towns and settlements were changed into Greek names. Tens of thousands of Greek adventurers preferred to settle in these places and together with the garrisons and the military and civic officers, left to govern the countries, gave to many of these old and new towns the form and character of the Greek cities whence they came. Egypt was turned into a Macedonian land, and the like happened to many of the Mediterranean border towns in Asia Minor.

The struggle between the new culture and the old habits of life and thought was nowhere as pronounced and as bitter as in Judea. The rigid safeguards and institutions established by Ezra and the scribes against foreign influences were unable to stand the strain of the powerful tide of Greek culture. As a result, many Jews, including also the priestly families, succumbed to the alluring attractions of the new forces. The upper classes were the first to be swept from

their moorings, because of their frequent contact with the ruling Greek officials. They changed their names to what seemed to them the more euphonious Greek names, used Greek as their vernacular, and were induced by the glamor which surrounded the athlete and the skilful wrestler or discus-thrower to learn and to participate in the Greek athletic games and to erect amphitheatres and gymnasia in Judean towns. As time progressed, they became identified with every phase of Greek life and stopped short only at the worship of the Greek Pantheon. They called themselves Hellenists, implying a desire to identify themselves with Greek nationality, remaining Jews in religion only. It was natural that such a movement should arouse the opposition of many who saw in it a denationalizing tendency and a menace to the preservation of the cherished principles of their religion. The opposition, however, was weak and inarticulate since the Hellenists occupied the important positions in the State and also in the ecclesiastical circles centering around the Temple, while the opposition consisted mainly of the students and teachers whose influence was limited. The attempts of Antiochus Epiphanes to force Hellenism upon the Jewish masses by means of despotic persecutions and anti-religious decrees strengthened the opposition and led many adherents of Hellenism to recant and return to the old standards of Judaism which they had rejected.

It was fashionable a few decades ago for some preachers to bemoan the defeat of Hellenism as a result of the Maccabean revolt, regarding the meeting of Greek and Jewish cultures a blessing to Judaism and to civilization. Some of them even went so far as to express profound sympathy with the Jewish Hellenists of that period, considering them as the real saviors of Judaism in their endeavor to add to it the beauty and grandeur of Greek culture. They sneered at the Hasidim, calling them puritans and zealots, narrow

chauvinists and religious fanatics. We must remember that the Hellenism of Egypt and Judea was very much unlike the Hellenism of Greece proper. It was only the outward sheen, the external glamor, brought by the soldiers and rulers into Judea, that dazzled the imagination of the Jewish youth. The depth of philosophic thought, of esthetic appreciation, of literary refinement and of artistic skill which characterized Greek culture at that time was hardly known among the Jews. At best, it was a very much diluted philosophy that was presented to them, and the easy-going attitude to life, the relief from moral restraint, the indulgences in physical pleasures, characteristic of the Syrian and Egyptian Greeks, bewildered the Jewish youth and made them an easy prey to the allurements of the new experiences. Many of their leaders were actuated by selfish motives of a coarser kind, the ambition for power and wealth and the desire to be accepted and favored by the ruling Greeks.

The rabbis and the Hasidic leaders did not entirely spurn Greek culture. They appreciated the beauty of the Greek language and declared that only in that language could the Torah be rendered adequately. They were, however, deeply conscious of the great dangers to their religion and national ideals in the blending of Hellenism with Judaism, in which the former would necessarily form the dominant part. The madness of Antiochus, manifested in his plan to coerce the Jews to abandon their peculiar institutions and adopt Greek polytheism together with Greek culture and attitude to life, helped to open the eyes of many others who had been misled by the glamor of Hellenism. One had to choose between the rigorous morality and the spiritual religion of Judaism and the pleasant and easy standards of conduct and the gross materialistic religion of Hellas. Both might contribute to the sum total of human civilization, as

indeed they did, only when each was permitted free development and unhampered growth in its respective sphere. The Hellenists of Judea need not be regarded as renegades and traitors, although quite a few of them undoubtedly were, but all of them misunderstood their position and their destiny and were misled into the belief that they could maintain their Jewishness while parading as Greeks. Judaism and Hellenism have always been and still are incompatible.

2

THE EARLY HASIDIM AND THE HASMONEANS

The rapid progress of the Hellenistic customs and mode of life among the Jews of Palestine, soon after it became a province of the Syrian empire (about 200 B. C. E.), brought about a reaction on the part of those who sought to remain loyal to Jewish traditions. The endeavor of the Jewish Hellenists to curry favor with the Greek rulers, in the process of which they did not hesitate to sacrifice many of the cherished institutions and habits of life of Judaism, caused the pious and devoted followers of the Torah to group themselves in opposition and intensify their adherence to Jewish observances by imposing upon themselves a rigorous regime, far beyond the requirements of the letter of the law. These were called *Hasidim* (Pious, Puritans), or *Kehal Hasidim* (Congregation of the Pious) and, in later literature, *Hasidim ha-Rishonim*, (early *Hasidim*). They did not seek political power and took small part in the dissensions and bickerings characteristic of that period. They were satisfied to be left alone to practise their stringent code of ethics and the requirements of the ceremonial law. They were not in any sense a distinct sect or faction, but the more strictly pious and observant element in the larger group that hated

Hellenism and saw in it the ruin of their cherished ideals and beliefs.

When Antiochus, on the advice of the perfidious High Priest Menelaus, set out to abolish the Jewish religion, these *Hasidim* were among the first to resist the royal decree, which commanded the people to renounce the laws of their God and to offer sacrifices to the Greek gods only. The many cruelties that accompanied the execution of the decree by the Greek officers added fuel to the zeal for their religion in the hearts of the *Hasidim*, and it is quite probable that many who had been lukewarm in the struggle between Hellenism and Judaism now joined the group of the pious, determined to share with them their sufferings and spiritual triumphs. It is also likely that many of the *Hasidim* who hid themselves in caves in order to evade the decrees of the king's officers, carried on propaganda for the cause of Judaism and succeeded in influencing many to remain steadfast in their convictions and resist the orders of the Syrian officers at any cost. The story is related that when one of their hiding places was discovered by the Greek commander and besieged on a Sabbath day, the *Hasidim* who lay concealed there did not raise a stone to defend themselves at the cost of desecrating the Sabbath and all of them perished at the hands of the soldiers.

When the flag of open rebellion was raised by Mattathias the Hasmonean and his sons, one of the first decisions reached by the brave handful of defenders was to permit the desecration of the Sabbath in case of an attack by the enemy on that day. The First Book of the Maccabees relates that the *Hasidim* accepted the decision and joined the company of fighters. At first, it appears, they threw in their lot with the Hasmonean brothers and identified themselves with them in every way. Later, as the Hasmonean brothers grew in power and influence, they gradually detached themselves from the strict rigorists. The Hasmoneans

sought to gain a complete victory over their enemies, to rid Judea of the hateful Greeks and to establish a strong temporal power of their own in the land. They could not remain in obscurity, devoted only to the minute observance of the laws and the customs, as were the *Hasidim*, since their new responsibilities and new powers demanded of them a wider outlook on life and a closer contact with the nations. This brought about a cleavage between the two groups which had worked hand in hand and fought shoulder to shoulder in the defense of their religion and of their ideals. The *Hasidim* gradually retired into obscurity and made room for other parties that had grown up in Judea after the Maccabean victories. It is surmised that remnants of the dissatisfied *Hasidim* later appeared as the Essenes, a party that continued its existence many years thereafter as devotees of the simple life, dedicated to the practice of the minutiae of the ritual law and living as recluses. Their influence on the later development of Judaism was insignificant, although they may have had a large share in the formation of early Christianity, the foremost leaders of which may have been members of that sect. The *Hasidim*, however, are referred to with great respect and reverence in rabbinic literature for a long time after their disappearance from the scene of history.

3

MODIN — THE HOME TOWN OF THE MACCABEES

The ancient town of Modin, the scene of the origin of the insurrection against the Syrian forces that invaded Judea, and the burial place of the valiant Hasmonean family who won the battle for freedom, has been identified with the modern El-Medyeh village, on the road from Jaffa to

Jerusalem. It was only in 1869 that the identification was made by a Polish archeologist, Dr. Sandrezcki, and this identification was later confirmed by eminent scholars and biblical investigators. The town together with the magnificent monuments erected there by the last surviving Hasmonean brother, Simon, was in existence in the early centuries of the present era and was known until about the fourth century. Thereafter all trace of its former renown disappeared, until the year 1869, when the Polish scholar was led to the investigation by the similarity of the former name with the modern Arabic name of Kabur-al-Yehud, given to a series of tombs in the immediate vicinity of the village. Later a British archeologist, C. R. Conder, and French scholars made further investigations in the district, but were as yet unable to identify the tombs of the Maccabees. Perhaps contemporary investigators will be more successful in this direction.

The noble priestly family, Mattathias and his five sons, retired from their posts in Jerusalem early in the period of the persecution of Antiochus and went to live in the town of Modin, probably their ancestral home. The head of this family was apparently advanced in years at that time, but possessed of the vigor and zeal of youth and of an indomitable courage which he transmitted to his heroic sons. The name Maccabee, borne by the most renowned of the five sons, Judah, was later applied to all the members of the family, although some have claimed that the name was really that of the father, seeing in it an abbreviation of the name *Mattathias Kohen ben Yohanan*, while the most popular theory regarding the origin of the name associates it with the banner carried by Judah, on which were inscribed the words: *Mi Kamocha Baelim Adonai* (Who is like unto Thee among the gods, O Lord). When the emissaries of Antiochus reached this small town (about 168 B. C. E.), and

erected an altar to Zeus, Mattathias was the first one invited to pay homage to the king by obeying his orders. The unhesitating reply of the patriarch was that even if all the peoples fall away from their religious affiliations, "yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances" (I Maccabees 2.20-21). When he beheld a Jew attempting to comply with the king's order, Mattathias could contain himself no longer, and struck down the Jew as well as the king's officer. This was the first blow struck in behalf of freedom of conscience and it initiated the stubborn revolution of a small unorganized band of zealots against the well-trained legions of the Syrian army. The rebellion was led by his third son, Judah, but Mattathias did not live to see the splendid results of the struggle. "And his sons buried him in the sepulchres of his fathers at Modin, and all Israel made great lamentations for him."

About twenty years after Judah succeeded in restoring freedom of conscience in Judea, the last surviving brother of the gallant five, Simon, became the leader of the nation. He had been designated by Mattathias as "a man of counsel, who shall be the father unto you." His very first act was to recover the bones of his brother Jonathan and have them buried in the sepulchre of his fathers at Modin. He then proceeded to build a magnificent monument over the family sepulchre, which he had surrounded by seven pyramids, to serve as memorials to his father, mother and four brothers and himself, when his time should come (ibid. 13.27-30). "On the faces of the monument were bas-reliefs representing the accoutrements of sword and spear and shield, 'for an eternal memorial' of their many battles. There was also the sculpture of 'ships,' no doubt to record their interest in the long seaboard of the Philistine coast which they were the first to use for their country's good. A

monument at once so Jewish in idea, so Gentile in execution, was worthy of the combination of patriotic fervor and philosophic enlargement of soul which raised the Maccabean heroes so high above their age" (Stanley, *The Jewish Church*, III, 318). The place of the tombs now at El-Medyeh is about 16 miles from the coast, so that one looking from the sea in the evening could readily see the general outline of the monument.

The fact that the Arabs call this tomb Kubur al-Yahud (The graves of the Jews) gives credence to the identification. It is related that Jews from near-by towns make pilgrimages to this place on Hanukkah, relying on the old tradition for its identification with the hallowed burial ground of the Maccabean heroes.

4

MATTATHIAS

The outstanding hero in the Maccabean victory over the Syrian forces is Judah, whose courage and fearless exploits brought about the astounding defeat of the armies of Antiochus, at the time regarded as invincible. The laurels of this important event in Jewish history, however, really belong to his father, the aged Mattathias, who raised the flag of rebellion and conducted the guerilla warfare for almost a year. According to the First Book of Maccabees, our main source of information, Mattathias died in 166 B. C. E., at the age of 146, so that when the rebellion got under way at his initiative he was already a very old man.

His genealogy as given in the book quoted makes him the "son of John, the son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, from Jerusalem, who dwelt in Modin." Josephus

mentions also the name Hasmonean which was probably a family name traced back to a remote ancestor. In the Talmud and in the prayer book, he is mentioned as the Hasmonean, and his family was later designated by that name, while the name Maccabee was the epithet by which Judah alone was known. Mattathias was probably a man of considerable influence who had fled from Jerusalem when it was laid waste by Appollonius and found shelter in the small town of Modin, situated between Jaffa and Jerusalem. When the king's soldiers under Apelles came to Modin to carry out the decree to hellenize Judea and to force the worship of Zeus upon the people, Mattathias apparently felt strong enough openly to oppose the cruel demands of Antiochus. As the representative Jew in the town, he was invited to bring the first offering on the heathen altar and was offered all kinds of inducements if he would set the example to his followers. He then made his famous declaration of defiance.

Of course, he must have realized that this constituted high treason and was ready to take the consequences. He slew the Jew who was about to commit the sacrilege of offering a sacrifice on the heathen altar and together with his sons he destroyed the small group that accompanied Apelles. His cry: "Whosoever is zealous for the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me," stirred many of the people of the town and its vicinity to join him and they proceeded to hide in the mountains whence they conducted their warfare against the Syrian armies that met with one defeat after another.

One of the most far-reaching reforms introduced by Mattathias was the permission granted to the Hasidean soldiers to engage in warfare for defense even on the Sabbath day. This was made necessary after many pious soldiers who would offer no resistance on the day of rest had been mercilessly butchered by the Syrians.

In the course of a short time, he and his sons succeeded in driving the Syrian troops from the vicinity of Modin, destroyed their altars and brought to judgment those renegade Jews who had been in the hire of the Syrian authorities. He also helped many who had refrained, out of fear, from circumcizing their children, to do so and inspired the faithful with courage to resist the demands of the king and to remain steadfast in their adherence to their religion.

When he felt that death was near, he gathered his five sons and delivered his farewell address to them which the author of the First Book of Maccabees has preserved for us. In it he enumerates the many heroes in Jewish history who had not yielded either to temptation or to coercion, but had remained true to their faith and tradition at all costs and had established the principle that "none that put their trust in Him shall be overcome. . . Wherefore, ye my sons, be valiant, and show yourselves men in behalf of the Law, for by it shall ye obtain glory." He then appointed Simon as the counsellor and Judah as the captain and he blessed them and was gathered to his fathers.

5

JUDAH THE MACCABEE

Judah the Maccabee was the third son of Mattathias and at the outbreak of the rebellion (168 B. C. E.) he must have been in the prime of his manhood. Although many of the distinguished priestly families of that time were sympathetic to the hellenizing efforts of Antiochus and were ready to accept the idea that it would be best for the Jews to adopt the customs and habits, the speech and dress of the Greeks, few among them were prepared to go to the length to which the "mad" king later insisted that they should go.

We are not told whether the family of Mattathias belonged to the *Hasidic* group which opposed all foreign influences and was exceedingly scrupulous in the observance of the smallest details of the religious ceremonies, or whether they were neutral in the struggle until Antiochus issued the decree banning all Jewish observances and converting the Temple in Jerusalem into a heathen sanctuary in which Zeus was enthroned. Mattathias in any event, apparently enjoyed considerable authority also among the *Hasidim*, so that when he permitted fighting on the Sabbath, the decision was accepted by them and by all the Maccabean armies, in which the *Hasidim* must have been quite numerous. Judah evinced in his brief career the zeal and devotion to his faith, characteristic of the *Hasidim*. He prayed to God before every battle; he was scrupulous in the observance of the laws; and the gratitude he expressed when victory came manifested itself in the chanting of psalms and songs of thanksgiving to the Savior of Israel.

Fired by an overwhelming devotion to his God, Judah guided the destinies of Israel for a period of seven years until he fell, a victim to his own courage and heroism. At first his strategy confined itself to guerilla warfare against the Syrian army, but when his success became known and thousands of fugitives joined his ranks, he became emboldened to fight pitched battles against the well-trained and well-equipped armies of Antiochus. After a series of such battles, in all of which Judah came out the victor, he found the road clear to Jerusalem and in 165 B. C. E., on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, he entered the Temple precincts, removed from there all vestiges of the heathen worship, purified the altar, consecrated it and established the feast of Hanukkah. However, the Syrian king did not accept the situation resignedly, but sent additional and larger armies against the Judean rebels. Judah met them and defeated them one after the other. He also had to lead

punitive expeditions against several of the smaller states round about Judea, which harassed their Jewish inhabitants because of jealousy of the success of Judah's arms. His greatest victory was in the engagement with Nicanor, who had to flee with 9,000 of his troops from before Judah's onslaught. This was regarded so significant that a special holiday was declared on this account, to be observed annually on the thirteenth day of Adar, the day of this victory (161 B. C. E.). It was then that Judah realized that he could not continue the struggle without outside help and invoked the aid of Rome against Syria, a step which historians consider to have been a serious error, because it gave Rome a pretext to interfere in Judean affairs, resulting in the complete subjugation of Judea by the Romans in the course of time.

It is nowhere stated whether Judah occupied any official position after his success with the Syrian armies. According to Josephus, the office of high priest was offered to him by the people after the sudden death of Alcimus, and in another place Josephus records that Judah served as high priest for three years before his death. The Books of the Maccabees say nothing of his occupying this position, nor is there any reference to it in rabbinic literature. He fell fighting in the battle of Elasa, when he was deserted by his most faithful followers, because of the overwhelming forces of the enemy. His remains were concealed and later buried in the family sepulchre at Modin. Throughout his career, Judah never betrayed a trace of selfishness or vainglory. His fight was for the glory of God and for the liberation of his people. His military genius, his superhuman courage and his wonderful generalship, as well as his religious zeal and piety, make Judah the Maccabee one of the most striking personalities in the whole range of Jewish history.

ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES

Antiochus IV was the son of Antiochus the Great, who had given him as hostage to the Romans that he would maintain peace and pay his tribute to the senate of Rome. Antiochus stayed there for thirteen years during the period when Rome was emerging from the severe simplicity of the Catos to become the world's capital city, with all the wickedness and immorality that greatness brought to its gates. There Antiochus learned "contempt of men and their cherished customs . . . not only an insolence, but a hardness of heart which knew no compassion, and the malice which sports with its victim before it strangles it." (Graetz, *History of the Jews*, I, 443). Upon his return to Syria in 175 B. C. E., he left his nephew, Demetrius, the son of his brother Seleucus II, then the King of Syria, as hostage in his place. His intention probably was to dethrone his brother and it may have been with his knowledge and through his instigation that his brother was assassinated by Heliodorus, one of the officers of the court. Soon after his arrival in Antioch, he was proclaimed king instead of the rightful heir, Demetrius, who was left languishing in Rome. This unscrupulous and bloodthirsty man had thus become the overlord over Judea which was then torn by the internal strife between the Hellenists and the more moderate parties. The man, who "neither revered the gods of his ancestors, nor any god whatever, for above all he magnified himself," was immediately attracted to the strife in Judea and supported the Hellenistic party in their work of subversion of the ancient Jewish ideals of morality and religion. For a goodly sum of money, he stripped the high priest Onias of his office and appointed his brother, Jason, in his place, because the latter was quite willing to

introduce the hateful games of the Greeks into Jerusalem. A short time after that, Antiochus did not hesitate to transfer the high priesthood from Jason to Menelaus, who may not have been even of the priestly family, because of a promise of a higher bribe than Jason could afford. He closed his eyes to the crime of sacrilege, regarded as offensive also to the Greeks, that Menelaus had to commit in order to get the necessary bribe, by stripping the Temple of many of its costly ornaments.

His lust for power led Antiochus to attack Egypt, while Rome was busy with its Macedonian expedition, and almost succeeded in conquering it. A false rumor of his fall that reached Jerusalem caused much rejoicing there; and when Antiochus heard of that he hastened back, attacked Jerusalem, forced his way into the Temple and even entered the Holy of Holies, regarding which he later spread most blasphemous reports about the worship of an ass, the head of which he found there. This was to excuse the horrible carnage which he carried out among the Judeans in revenge for their insubordination to his will. Another lie which he is said to have invented and to which he gave wide publicity was that he found in the Temple a Greek whom the Jews were about to sacrifice and feed on his intestines. He then went back to Egypt, but conditions had changed and he had to return in disgrace after a Roman delegation forbade his moving forward to carry out his plans. To avenge himself again on the Judeans and to appease his own wrath over the ignominy that overtook him, he caused another massacre of innocent people in Jerusalem and finally agreed to the plan presented by Menelaus of effecting a complete annihilation of the Jewish religion and practices which were believed to stand in the way of their complete regimentation into Greek life and habits. The desecration of the Temple and the vigorous enforcement of the edicts against circumcision, against the observance of the Sabbath and of the

dietary laws followed in quick succession. The statue of Zeus was placed on the altar in Jerusalem and the Jews were compelled to offer swine on it one day every month. The revolt of the *Hasidim* and the wonderful accomplishments of the Hasmonean family in resisting these policies and finally overthrowing the yoke of the tyrant are the reason for the celebration of the festival of Hanukkah throughout all subsequent Jewish history.

Beaten in battle by the courageous band of the weak and unwarlike *Hasidim*, foiled in his attempt to subdue the Parthians, disappointed in all his vainglorious and grandiose plans for personal aggrandizement, Antiochus died in the Persian city of Tabae from a loathsome disease. He left a heritage of dissension and jealousies in his own family which eventually destroyed his dominions and brought about the ruin and the complete collapse of the Syrian empire. His contemporaries looked upon him as demented and irresponsible, and subsequent historians, with but a few exceptions, branded him as a brutal tyrant, a malicious interloper and a capricious and petty designer, who was swamped by his own overestimate of his powers and destroyed by his own miscalculations. In Jewish writings he is known simply as the *Rasha*, the wicked, unprincipled and immoral person, and with this all other sources are quite in agreement.

7

ANTIOCHUS' AMBITIONS

The Jews of Palestine and of Egypt during the second century before the present era were not at all averse to the adoption of Hellenistic forms of life and of thought. The onrush of Greek civilization that inundated all of Asia Minor and of Northern Africa after the conquests of

Alexander the Great affected also the lives of the Jewish people who became attracted to that new culture and felt charmed by its attractive qualities. The Greek language gradually became the vernacular among the wealthier and more cultured elements of Jewish society, while Greek proper names became the rule among all sections of the population. The finer elements of Greek culture, its philosophy, its poetry and its emphasis on the esthetic in life, allured thousands of Jews from the rigid regimen of Jewish observances to the easier and more worldly practices which characterized Greek life. Thus games of all kinds and the Greek gymnasia were introduced in Jewish communities and attracted many of the younger element who were fascinated by these novel forms of entertainment. This process had been going on both in Egypt, where the Jewish community grew in numbers and in influence most rapidly, as well as in Palestine, without arousing any strenuous opposition.

Among practically all the nations of antiquity religion was tied up with the state in a most intimate manner. The civilization of a country was characterized by its manners, its literary output and its religious cult. With the shifting rulership, there was also a change in the religious attitudes and practices. It was not any more difficult for the Egyptian or Babylonian to adopt Zeus as his god and to worship him in the manner prescribed by the Greek ritual than to adopt the Greek names for his children and the Greek dress for himself. He did not necessarily give up his ancient beliefs and his household gods; he merely added the new gods and the new rituals to those to which he had been accustomed, although it was natural that the new practices should gradually displace the old ones in the course of time. Religion as a state and social matter, confined for the most part to set forms of ritual, was not taken

too seriously by the Greek leaders nor by their new followers, and the change from one set of observances to another was a matter of little consequence.

Some of the more radical Hellenists among the Jews also followed the same trend and, with the adoption of the Greek forms of life, they were not very scrupulous as to whether any of these were antagonistic to their Jewishness. The great bulk of Jewish Hellenists, however, stopped short of practices that went contrary to the teachings of their religion and discriminated between the cultural side and the heathenish phases of Hellenism. To the great masses, seeing the havoc that Greek practices brought to Jewish religious ideals and observances, all Hellenistic forms of life were anathema; they saw in them the subversion of all that they held sacred and inviolable.

This was something that Antiochus was unable to understand when he set out to regiment the various tribes and nationalities that comprised the Seleucid state in accordance with the Hellenistic pattern. The persecutions instituted by him against those who persisted in observing the Jewish religion were not instigated by religious zeal on his part any more than are the Nazi persecutions of the present time. Superficial as his own religious views were, he assumed that with other peoples religion is of as little consequence and when he later realized the stubborn resistance offered by the *Hasidim* to his edicts he attributed this to their natural perversity and stiff-neckedness. The opposition with which his policies were met on the part of a subdued nation constituted in his eyes treason to the state and to his royal person. The people of Judea were thus classed as rebels and every means had to be adopted to stem the rebellion and cow such a stubborn people. The Syrian provinces must all become Hellenized in every detail, the totalitarian system of Hellenistic ideals and practices must spread to every town and hamlet of his

dominions and the obstreperous *Hasidim* must be rooted out. It was not a racial ideology such as is assumed by the modern Nazis and their imitators, the Italian Fascists, since Antiochus was ready to permit the Jews to remain in peace once they subscribed to the tenets and principles of Hellenism, including its religious ritual and heathen cult. Antiochus' totalitarian ambitions centered around the state which comprised also religion in the form known to him.

The Jews of Judea might have become assimilated to Hellenism, even as their brethren in Alexandria had been, if the tyrant had not set out to regiment their religious views and acts in accordance with their Hellenistic standard by coercion. What effect this might have had on the later course of Jewish history and of the development of Jewish ideals is a matter of speculation that may produce some interesting results. Antiochus overreached himself in his endeavor to crush spiritual longings in a people among whom the spirit stood higher than their earthly comfort and life itself, and his ambitions were frustrated by the doughty band of zealots whose descendants to this day have continued a desperate struggle against any totalitarian attempt, whereby the emotions and ideals of man are enslaved and suppressed.

8

HANNAH AND HER SEVEN SONS

In the martyrology of the religious persecutions by Antiochus the story of Hannah and her seven sons is the best known, forming the subject of many a drama and serving as a potent stimulus to martyrs of all ages. It is found in the second Book of the Maccabees and is repeated in rabbinic literature in various forms.

In the earliest source (II Maccabees, chapter 7), the story is given without mentioning the name of the mother. "Seven brethren with their mother were taken and compelled by the king against the law to taste swine's flesh and were tormented with scourges and whips." The king is obviously Antiochus who is represented as conducting the process of compulsion in person. The first one tried was the one who spoke out first, defying the king and asserting that they would rather die than transgress the laws of God. Withstanding the most horrible torture and maiming of his body, he died with the encouragements of his brothers who quoted scriptural passages in which the kindness of God and His mercy are stressed. The second son underwent similar tortures, but he also remained firm, declaring "when he was at the last gasp," "Thou like a fury takest us out of this present life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for His law, unto everlasting life."

The king and his counsellors marvelled at the intrepidity of these men, but, determined to break their wills, they proceeded to increase the torture of the next victims, but they mocked him and remained steadfast in their determination. The third, fourth and fifth sons met their fate with the same courage as their predecessors, each affirming his faith in the ultimate justice of God. The sixth son also submitted to the ordeal, declaring that he knows that the punishment was decreed upon them because of their sins, and holding out to the king still greater punishments for his inhuman conduct. When the last and youngest of the brothers was brought before the king, Antiochus tried to coax him into obedience by promising him that he would make him both "a rich and happy man, if he would turn from the laws of his fathers; and that also he would take him for his friend, and trust him with affairs." When the young man refused to follow the king's orders, the mother was called in and told to use her influence with the

young man to save his life. She promised to do so, but she spoke to the lad in her own language and exhorted him to remain steadfast and not to submit to the king's allurements. Even before she finished speaking to him the boy exclaimed that he would not obey the king's order, but that he would obey the commandment of the law that was given unto our fathers by Moses. He then delivered a lengthy harangue in which he declared that, while God may appear angry at Israel just at this moment, he will again have pity on His people; but for the king there will be no mercy, for he will not escape the judgment of God. After her last son had been put to death in a more cruel manner than his brothers, the mother also died.

As recorded in the Midrash to Lamentations (I.50, in Buber's edition, paragraph 420), the scene of Hannah's story is laid during the period of the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman legions under Titus. This is apparently the source for the many other versions found in rabbinic literature. In a late Midrash (*Tana debe Eliyahu Rabba*, 30), the scene is further shifted to the Bar Kochba Rebellion and the emperor is mentioned by name as Hadrian, while the woman is described as a widow. The name of the woman is given in these sources as Miriam the daughter of Nahtum or Tanhum, about whom other stories are given in the same connection; the request of the king is not the violation of a ceremonial law but that they should prostrate themselves before the idol. The responses of each of the sons are, therefore, quite different from those given in the apocryphal Book of the Maccabees. They mock the king for the futility and helplessness of his idols, quoting biblical passages in support of their arguments. There is a pathetic ending to the story in the Midrash. When the king refuses the mother's plea that she should be slain before her youngest child is put to death, she turns to the child and

says to him: "My son, go to the patriarch Abraham and tell him, thus said my mother, 'Do not preen yourself, saying I built an altar and offered up my son Isaac.' Behold our mother built seven altars and offered up seven sons in one day. Besides, yours was only a test, but mine was in earnest." It further relates that after a few days, the woman became demented and threw herself down from a roof and died, although in *Pesikta Rabbati*, 43, it is said that she was put to death by order of the king.

The name of the mother, omitted in the II Maccabean version as well as in Josephus and the Talmud (*Gittin*, 57b), is mentioned in the earlier versions as Miriam, while in a later rabbinic writing the name of Hannah is given to her, the name which has remained associated with the story to the present time. This may be due to the association that the homilists found between the case of the woman who had lost all her children and Hannah, the mother of Samuel, who was blessed with a child after years of barrenness (see *Pesikta*, *ib.*; *Yalkut* to Psalms 113). In its original form, however, the story is definitely connected with the religious persecutions of Antiochus as also in *Josippon*, (Book III, ch. 5) and the popular mind has so considered it throughout the ages. Many of the plays arranged for presentation on Hanukkah have this story as their main theme.

9

THE BOOKS OF THE MACCABEES

The historical background of the festival of Hanukkah is contained in the First Book of the Maccabees, which is included among the Apocryphal Books of the Bible. All critics agree in regarding this work as genuinely historical, "comparing favorably, in point of trustworthiness, with the

best Greek and Roman histories." It was originally written in Hebrew, probably by a devotee of the Hasmonean dynasty, but the original has been lost and the book has been preserved only in its Greek translations, from which translations into other languages have been made. The book was apparently unknown to the rabbis of the Talmud, who based the observance of Hanukkah upon the miraculous story of the cruse of oil, sufficient only for one day, which lasted for seven days. The reference to the Hasmonean victories is rather hazy in this account (see Shabbat, 23b). A Hebrew version of the book did not come into existence until the eighteenth century and for this reason the book as well as the other works of the Apocrypha were little known to Jews during the entire medieval period.

With a pious devotion to the Law and the precepts, and with a love for Jewish ideals and concepts of life, abhorring the abominations of the heathens, the author of I Maccabees relates his story in a simple and direct style, avoiding all embellishments and restraining even his religious zeal in making comments on the stirring events which he narrates. The fact that God is not mentioned by name in the whole book has been taken by critics to indicate that the author believed God to be dwelling in the remote heavens, having no concern with the affairs of men. This has been refuted by both Christian and Jewish scholars, who point out that God's name is not mentioned because at that period Jews refrained from speaking of God by name, but that all the events and triumphs achieved by the Maccabees are directly ascribed to a benign Providence, who ever champions the cause of the righteous. Still, the author does not permit his theological bias to become too prominent and full credit is given to the prowess and bravery of the Maccabees and their adherents for victories which they had won. Their military skill and their diplomatic wisdom are frequently referred to and highly esteemed and their final

triumph is ascribed directly to their unusual abilities and spiritual strength. The book covers the history of the period from 175 to 135 B. C. E., that is from the accession of Antiochus IV, known as Epiphanes, to the throne of Syria, to the death of the Hasmonean prince Simon. This is prefaced by a brief introduction, in which the work of Alexander the Great and the process whereby Judea became a Syrian province are summarized. The author is very careful to give dates (after the Seleucidian Era) and to define geographical positions, although he sometimes falls into error, especially regarding Greek and Roman history, and occasionally exaggerates the numbers of combatants, a practice common to all historians of antiquity.

The Septuagint contains also another Book of the Maccabees, quite different from the first in many instances, which was probably written originally in Greek, and which has a distinct religious tendency. The author tells us that he undertook to give a summary of a larger work by a certain Jason of Cyrene, who described the events of which he had been an eyewitness. The author of II Maccabees, covers only a period of about fifteen years, from the last year of Seleucus IV to the death of the general Nicanor at the hands of Judah Maccabee. The book is introduced by two letters, supposed to have been written by the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem to the Jews of Egypt, inviting them to join with the Palestinian Jews in the celebration of the festival of Hanukkah. It is clear that the work was written by a devout Pharisee who was displeased with the conduct of the later Hasmonean rulers, but it cannot be established with certainty whether he was a Palestinian or an Alexandrian Jew.

There are also versions of a Third and a Fourth and even a Fifth Book of the Maccabees, but none of them adds anything to our knowledge of the period, although all of them

have historical interest and significance. The Third Book relates an incident of persecution of the Jews in Egypt and their miraculous deliverance, while the Fourth Book is really a homily, a Hanukkah sermon, addressed to a Greek-speaking congregation and combining in a masterly form Greek philosophy and Jewish religious idealism. This last book has been ascribed to Josephus, but there is no foundation for the assumption. The Fifth Book, known as the Arabic Book of the Maccabees, is of late origin and is merely a compilation of earlier records and has but little historical value.

Among the Jews of the Middle Ages, another source for the story of the Maccabees was known, under the name of *Megillat Antiochus* (The Scroll of Antiochus), often found included in the more complete editions of the Prayer Book. The first reference to this scroll is found in the works of Saadia (10th century). Names and events are here confused and legends are given as historic occurrences. The author apparently drew largely upon the midrashic interpretations of the Hanukkah story, although the first book of the Maccabees was not unknown to him. It is strange that this was the chief source for a knowledge of the Maccabean struggles, known to the Jews of the entire period of the Middle Ages up to modern days. It is quite likely that its legendary nature and the many stories which it graphically depicts contributed to making it popular and acceptable to medieval Jewry.

10

THE STORY OF JUDITH AND HANUKKAH

Jewish legend loves to associate the story of the Apocryphal book of Judith with the Maccabean history. Even in Jewish law, the reason given for the custom that women

abstain from doing any labor while the Hanukkah candles are burning is that the miracle was performed through the hands of a woman, referring to the relief from the enemy effected by the scheme carried out by Judith. Similarly, the custom of eating cheese on Hanukkah is explained on the ground that Judith had to eat only foods made of milk while she partook of the feast prepared by Holofernes in her honor. These associations are not warranted by the earlier versions of the story, which place it at a much earlier time and mention no connection between this tale and the Maccabean wars. It was only in later versions, found in the original Hebrew, that the names of the characters and the incidents are changed for names and events connected with the Maccabean insurrection and final victory.

The story of Judith, as found in the accepted version of the Apocrypha, is recognized as one of the finest specimens of storytelling that has come down to us from antiquity. The city of Bethulia, lying at a strategic point on the way to Jerusalem, was attacked by Holofernes, a general of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Assyria(?). The High Priest, Joakim, and the Sanhedrin were anxious to save the city of Bethulia, whereby they hoped that Jerusalem might escape the enemy's attack. The siege, however, was too severely trying on the population and the leaders of the city had to promise that unless relief came to them within five days they would surrender to the enemy. Judith, a rich and beautiful young widow, undertook to obtain deliverance for her people. She prepared herself with devout prayers and ritual purification and made her way to the headquarters of Holofernes. She prophesied to him the speedy downfall of the city because the people would have to transgress God's laws when forced to stave off starvation by eating forbidden food. Impressed by her beauty and her effective arguments, Holofernes arranged a banquet in her honor. When he was in a stupor of drunkenness, she cut

off his head and displayed it to the soldiers who, in dismay, fled in panic, so that the Jews were able to attack them and to obtain large spoils. Judith became the favorite heroine of her people and reached a ripe old age surrounded by the affection and esteem of the Jews.

The confusion of historical data and the geographical incongruities in the story have led many critics to the belief that the author intended it to be purely a work of fiction, without any other motive in his mind. Still, the accuracy and detail of some of the descriptions contained in the book make it almost impossible to dissociate it from some of the exciting events in history, the memory of which the author apparently sought to perpetuate in his narrative. The religious significance of the story is quite obvious. It stresses the point that as long as the Jews are faithful to their God and observant of all the details of the ceremonial law, no enemy will be able to prevail against them. The ethics of Judith's conduct in the palace of Holofernes are apparently to be regarded in the light of the warlike state of the country, when deviations from truth and treacherous murder are not taken as sinful. The story of Jael and Sisera (Judges 4.13-21) is the classic example of that sort of morality. While the story as we have it was written in Greek, scholars agree that it was originally composed in Hebrew, from which the Greek is a translation.

Hebrew versions of a later date have been unearthed, most of which introduce considerable variations from the Greek text. Dr. Moses Gaster published a Hebrew version of the story in 1894, which he regarded as the original. In the Hebrew versions and in the homilies based upon them, Judith is made a member of the Hasmonean family, the name of the general is not Holofernes, but Nicanor, the famous Syrian general who was defeated by Judah Maccabee and whose defeat was regarded of such great moment

that a special festival was established in memory of the event, known as *Yom Nicanor*. Instead of Bethulia, the scene is laid in Jerusalem and the entire story is made to revolve around the Maccabean exploits. It is difficult to explain why an author writing during the Maccabean times should seek to hide the identity of his characters and to confuse the mind of the readers by a jumble of historical inaccuracies. There is no reference to Judith in the books of the Maccabees, nor in the later *Megillat Antiochus*, but Jewish legend persisted in connecting this book with the miraculous story of the Maccabean victories.

11

HANUKKAH — A HOME FESTIVAL

With the exception of chanting the *Hallel* and reading from the Torah, the services in the synagogue on Hanukkah differ but little from those of the ordinary weekdays. In many synagogues, indeed, candles are lit every evening after the *Maariv* services; but this is done mainly for the benefit of strangers or of the homeless. In the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer a paragraph ('*Al ha-Nissim*'), telling briefly the story of the Maccabean victory, is inserted. Otherwise, there are no distinctive features marking the festival in the synagogue or in the life of the Jew, as no restriction was placed in the matter of business or labor on the days of Hanukkah.

The spirit of the festival was felt mainly in the home and mostly in the evenings when the lights were kindled. The rabbinic law prohibits the use of the lights for profane purposes and also the doing of any labor while the lights are burning. The *shammash* was to supply light for the household, and was placed in a conspicuous position so that it

should not be counted in the number of required lights. Since no work was permitted, the half hour or more during which the Hanukkah lights burned was employed in relating the stories and legends connected with the festival or in playing games of different kinds.

Because of the legendary association of the story of Judith with the Maccabean struggle, Jewish women abstained from doing hard work during the days of Hanukkah. The valorous act of Judith was further commemorated by Jewish women in the special foods of milk and cheese, because of the tradition that Judith provided herself with such food when she went out of Bethulia to the camp of Holofernes, where she expected to stay until she would be able to carry out her plan. Dishes of all kinds were prepared by the women to serve as refreshments for the men engaged in playing games until late at night. The favorite dish was the *Latkes*, a sort of pancake made of ground potatoes fried in fat or in butter; but more substantial dishes were not wanting, such as roast goose and other delicacies reserved for such gatherings.

Both children and adults indulged in games of chance during the night of Hanukkah, and the efforts of the rabbis to check this custom proved of no avail. Israel Davidson, in his *Parody in Jewish Literature*, describes a talmudic travesty, entitled "Pleasantries for the Days of Hanukkah," prepared by Abraham ben Simhah Calimani when he was only thirteen years of age, and published in Venice in 1617. This parody deals especially with the custom of card playing on Hanukkah. Another talmudic parody, written by an American Jew, Gerson Rosenzweig, and published in a Hebrew periodical in New York in 1899, is a clever and ingenious travesty on the custom of card playing on Hanukkah which had become so prevalent. Often these games did not terminate with the extinction of the Hanukkah lights, but were continued through much of the night.

After the fall of the Ghetto walls, which brought Jews and Christians into more intimate contact, the Hanukkah festival, coming as it does near to the Christmas season, was invested with greater importance and surrounded with additional ceremonies in order to counteract the Christian influences that pervaded the atmosphere. The religious school, also a product of the emancipation period, was utilized for the purpose of intensifying the Jewish spirit at this season, and the Hanukkah play then came into vogue. A product of German Jewry, it was developed considerably in this country, and we have now quite a number of plays that have real merit. There was first the play that endeavored to depict some scene or event of the Maccabean struggle in which the incident of Hannah and her seven sons furnished the most ready material for histrionic abilities. Later the modern play, in which Hanukkah observance in a modern Jewish home is described, came into existence and gradually displaced the historical drama. Most of these plays have been written primarily for children, and all the parts are played by them. Besides the play proper, the school entertainment also provides for some music, the recitation of appropriate selections in prose and verse, and the lighting of the candles by the children. Candies are usually distributed to the children by the women of the congregation. Thus the Hanukkah spirit is preserved now both in the home and in the religious school through the additional forms of celebration which time and conditions have brought into existence.

12

HANUKKAH AND THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

The historicity of the Maccabean victory over the Syrian armies is established beyond any doubt not only from Jewish but also from other records. The origin of the festi-

val commemorating this event, however, is not as clearly authenticated and scholars have been discussing it for many centuries.

The name "Hanukkah" (Dedication) has specific reference to the rededication of the Temple and the altar after these had been in the hands of the heathens for two years and were polluted by them with heathen worship and sacrifices. It thus had a purely religious significance confined to the Temple and its worship, and it is so described in the Apocryphal book of First Maccabees. Josephus, however, speaks of it merely as the Feast of Lights and seems to be in doubt as to its origin. Professor Solomon Zeitlin, in an essay published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, endeavors to establish the theory that in the Temple the festival was observed as a dedication festival, while in the homes of the people and in the villages it was celebrated by means of lighting torches to memorialize the Maccabean victories. All other festivals, he proceeds to show, have had double meanings indicative of their religious and national significances. This festival was designated as Hanukkah by the religious leaders and as the Feast of Lights by the masses of the people. After the destruction of the Temple, the religious name of Hanukkah predominated and in the Talmud reasons other than those given by Josephus and the Palestinian *Tannaim* had to be found to account for the custom of lighting candles during the festival. It was thus that the legend of the cruse of oil was made the real reason for the kindling of the lights.

A slightly different account of the festival is given in the Second Book of Maccabees. Speaking of the manner in which the dedication of the Temple was carried out, the author continues: "And they kept eight days with gladness in the manner of the Feast of Tabernacles. . . they bare branches and fair boughs, and palms also, and sang psalms unto Him that had given them good success in cleaning His place. They ordained also by a common statute and

decree, that every year those days should be kept of the whole nation of the Jews" (10.6-8). The connection between Hanukkah and Tabernacles is further emphasized in the introduction to this book which is in the form of a letter from the Jews of Palestine to the Jews of Egypt enjoining the latter to observe the Festival of Hanukkah (ib. 1.9.18).

13

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FEAST OF LIGHTS

Light has always been associated with joy and happiness. It is also used as a figure of speech for the soul of man, for the Torah, and even for God. "Light shines for the righteous" is parallel to the phrase "and gladness to the upright of heart" (Psalms 97.11). When God said: "Let there be light," He had in mind the righteous people of the world, such as Abraham. The Torah is often compared to light and the perpetual light kept in front of the Ark in the synagogue is intended to convey the idea of the enlightening power of the Torah. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path," sings the Psalmist (119.105). Light is often used in the Bible as a figure of speech for the soul of man. "For the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" (Proverbs 20.27). This may be the origin of the custom of lighting a light in the house of mourning and also on the anniversary (*Yahrzeit*) of the death of a relative, the light serving as a symbol of the continued existence of the soul of the departed.

In Jewish ceremonial, light plays quite an important part. The arrival of the Sabbath and the festivals is greeted with the kindling of lights, which is usually made the obligation of the housewife. "Without light there can be no peace in the house," the rabbis said, and the welcome

extended to the Sabbath and to the festivals should be accompanied by this symbol of joy and gladness. Similarly, on all occasions of joy, such as weddings and circumcision ceremonies, lights should be kindled in order to enhance the joy of these events. One of the most coveted *Mizvot* was the contribution of candles to the synagogue for use in prayer and in study. As a symbol of the hope for forgiveness of sin, candles are lit in the synagogue by individuals on the eve of the Day of Atonement, which are made large enough to last throughout the day.

Hanukkah, however, stands out especially as the Festival of Lights. Since the lights in this case are intended primarily to proclaim the wonders achieved by the Maccabean warriors, no profane use may be made of them, and other lights should be provided for purposes of illumination. Women also are included in the obligation of lighting the Hanukkah candles and no work is permitted while the candles burn. It is because of this injunction that the custom arose of playing games on Hanukkah to while away the time when no work was allowed. The reason for the *Shammash* (the servant light), the extra candle wherewith the others were kindled, is that no use may be made of the candles themselves, even to kindle one another, hence an additional candle was necessary for lighting them. It is prescribed that the candles should be large enough to last at least for half an hour after sunset.

The evening service contained no additional material except that the lights were kindled in the synagogue after the service. Every one hurried home immediately after the service, so as not to delay the lighting of the candles at home, which had to be kindled early, while people were still in the streets, so as to give publicity to the event. It was customary to have the lights placed in the windows or outside the doors, and it is related that in Venice the Jews would row on gondolas through the Ghetto and greet each

house which had the Hanukkah lights displayed with a benediction and songs. This custom was, however, abolished and the Hanukkah lamp was taken into the house for reasons that are quite obvious.

14

THE HANUKKAH MENORAH

The lamps used for the Hanukkah lights are called Menorahs, after the name given the seven-branched candlestick in the Temple. The Hanukkah Menorah, however, contains eight sockets, and according to an ancient practice was fed by oil. Opinion varied as to whether all should be lighted on the first day and the number reduced each successive day, or one light kindled on the first day and the number increased on each of the following days. The latter custom, following the opinion of Hillel as against that of Shammai, has been the mode of observance throughout the ages. A ninth lamp (*Shammash*, The Servant Light) was added to serve as a lighter to the other candles. While originally the lights were placed outside the house, this became inconvenient when the Jews had to live among other peoples. Especially when they were under Persian rule, where fire-worship dominated, the Jews had to hide their lights in their homes and not display them outside for fear of antagonizing the Parthians. Later, in the Ghettos of Europe, it became the custom to place the lights on the window sills inside the house, thus guarding against their extinction and at the same time observing the original law of "publishing the miracle."

The removal of the Menorah from the outside to the inside of the house was probably an incentive for the introduction of elaborate artistic designs for the Hanukkah

lamps, of which numerous examples have been preserved dating back to the Middle Ages. Recent excavations have yielded Menorahs of earlier date, which bear simple designs. Brass, silver and other metals were used in the making of these lamps, and their shapes and forms are various and diversified. The decorations, too, were of an extensive assortment, including reproductions of lions, eagles, flowers of a great variety, as well as scenes of the Maccabean struggles. In one instance Judah is represented holding a sword in one hand and the head of the Syrian general, Lysias, in the other, a rather gruesome picture. Some of these figures were of gold or silver, while others were placed in relief on the background of the lamp. Most of these lamps were made to be used with oil, with eight sockets placed in the base and the *Shammash* suspended at the top, but there are also many specimens of candelabras with the eight arms coming out from a stem and the ninth above them in the middle of the stem itself. Frequently, the *Shammash* was placed on the left side, but always protruding above the other lights. While a reproduction of the Temple Menorah for other purposes was forbidden, many of the Hanukkah Menorahs include several of the features of the Menorah as described in the Book of Exodus (37.17-24). The *Jewish Encyclopedia* has a reproduction of a twelfth century French Menorah, in the Cluny museum of Paris, which is triangular in shape, having the sockets at the bottom and the *Shammash* on the side and the back decorated with a circular disc.

Abstention from work, the characteristic of all festivals, did not apply to the Minor Feasts. Women, however, were accustomed to abstain from work at least on the first

and last days of the festival of Hanukkah. While the lights were burning, all stopped their usual occupations, and in order to while away the time pleasantly a number of games were introduced, in which the members of the family participated. Most of these games were borrowed by the Jews of the Middle Ages from their Christian neighbors, who likewise indulged in games during the Christmas season, which often comes close to the Hanukkah festival. A favorite game among Jews was one known as *Katoves* which was probably original with them. The origin of the word is buried in obscurity although many conjectures have been made to account for its etymology. This was an intellectual game, including riddles and enigmas of all kinds, puns on words and computations of letters in their numerical value, in which the number forty-four, the total number of candles used on Hanukkah, was most prominent.

However, not all the games played on the festival were as innocent as *Katoves*. In the fifteenth century cards became the prevalent pastime both among Jews and Christians and gradually superseded all other games on Hanukkah. Although the rabbis strongly opposed the habit of card playing and passed many enactments against those who indulged in it, they did not extend the prohibition to Hanukkah. In 1623 the rabbis of Venice issued a decree of excommunication against any member of the community who should play cards within a period of six years. This vice was especially common among the Jews of Italy, and the famous Rabbi Leon de Modena was also infected by the habit. Still, the enactments were probably little heeded by the people, as is evidenced by the fact that they had to be repeated so frequently. The restriction was especially disregarded on the festival of Hanukkah and also on the eve of Christmas (*Nittal* or *Natal Nacht*) when even rabbis and the students of the *Yeshibahs* indulged in these games.

One of the favorite Hanukkah games among the Jews of Germany and Poland was the *Trendel* or *Dreidel*, and this game is still in vogue especially among children. It is played with a revolving die, made of lead or wood and is something like the game of "put-and-take" which was popular for a time in this country. On the four sides of the die are the following letters: *Gimmel*, which stands for "ganz" (all), meaning that the player gets all; *Heh* which stands for "halb" (half), meaning that he gets half; *Nun*, which stands for "nichts" (nothing), meaning that he gets nothing; and *Shin* which stands for "stell" (put in), meaning that he has to put or add. Out of these four letters Jewish ingenuity made a phrase: *Nes Gadol Hayah Sham* (A great miracle occurred there) thus making it appropriate for the festival with its reference to the legendary story of the miracle of the cruse of oil. In England a similar game used to be played, which was called *Teetotum*. Israel Abrahams relates that this game is still played in some parts of Ireland by the peasantry during the Christmas season. Although it was also a gambling game, no objection was raised against the *Trendel* by the rabbis and elders of the communities. The custom of presenting gifts to children on Hanukkah was widespread and these gifts usually consisted of money called *Hanukkah Gelt*, so that the children had some spare pennies which they used in playing the *Trendel* game.

The celebration of the festival of Hanukkah was confined mainly to the home and it assumed the nature of a quiet family observance. Dramatic performances in the public hall or at the houses of the rich were confined to Purim, and it is only in recent years, and especially in this country, that the presentation of Hanukkah plays became an established custom. The most important ceremony of the feast, that of kindling the lights, was often followed by the singing of hymns by all the members of the family. The hymn that

has become most popular, the *Maoz Zur*, paraphrased in English by the words "Rock of Ages," is assumed to have been written by Mordecai Halevi in the thirteenth century. The melody to which it is sung is said to have been borrowed from a German folksong, which was also used by Luther in his German chorals.

V

MINOR DAYS OF COMMEMORATION

THE FAST OF TEBET

THE SABBATH OF SONG

THE NEW YEAR FOR TREES

THE FAST OF TEBET

THE tenth day of Tebet is observed as a fast day in commemoration of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia, in 588 B.C.E. It is one of the four fast days mentioned in the book of Zechariah (8.19), which had already been observed in the Babylonian exile. In an ancient document it is recorded that the ninth of Tebet was also observed as a fast day; but no reason for this is given. Later authorities connect the ninth of Tebet with the anniversary of the death of Ezra, which was kept as a day of fasting and mourning. The fast on the tenth, however, has biblical authority and has been observed throughout the generations.

The historic background of this fast day concerns one of the most important periods in the early stages of Jewish history. The powerful empire of Assyria, which had dominated all the lands of the East for centuries, was gradually approaching the period of its dissolution. Hordes of barbarians, the Scythians, came from the East and overran its dominions. Some of the dependent provinces, including Babylonia and Media, took advantage of the opportunity and plotted the overthrow of Nineveh, capital city of the Assyrian empire. Egypt, too, sought to regain its former supremacy by attacking the provinces in the South and the West and, at Megiddo, gained a victory over Josiah, the king of Judah, one of the most pious and most high-minded rulers that Judah had. Josiah was killed in this battle in 608 B.C.E., and first his youngest son, Jehoahaz, and later his son Jehoiakim were placed on the throne as vassals of Egypt.

Meanwhile, the kings of Media and of Babylonia com-

bined against Assyria, and in 606 the great city of Nineveh "fell with a crash that shook the world." This was followed by the decisive battle at Carchemish, on the Euphrates, between the force of the Babylonians and of the Egyptians. Pharaoh Necho was defeated and all his possessions in Syria, including Judea, passed into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar who soon after became the king of the newly created Babylonian empire. Jehoiakim at first agreed to cast his lot with Nebuchadnezzar and assumed the position of a vassal king. However, in spite of the repeated warnings of the prophet, Jeremiah, Jehoiakim afterwards refused to pay the annual tribute to Babylonia and Nebuchadnezzar turned to Jerusalem and besieged it. By the time that the Babylonian army appeared before the gates of Jerusalem, Jehoiakim had died and his son, Jehoiachin, was proclaimed king over Judea. The city was captured and sacked and the boy-king, Jehoiachin, who was only eighteen years of age at the time, together with all the nobles and the wealthy members of the nation were taken captive to Babylon. Jehoiachin remained in a Babylonian prison for thirty-seven years, when he was set free by the successor of Nebuchadnezzar.

Zedekiah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, was appointed king over the decimated Jewish nation, under the suzerainty of Babylonia. He was a weak man who listened to everybody's advice and was finally persuaded by the hot-heads in Jerusalem to throw off the yoke of Babylonia and to seek aid from Egypt. Jeremiah, who urged loyalty to Babylon, was subjected to most humiliating treatment, was thrown into prison and his life put in jeopardy several times, because of his advocacy of submission. The fatal revolt took place in 589 B.C.E. and Nebuchadnezzar's army arrived at once and besieged Jerusalem. This occurred on the tenth of Tebet, early in January of 588. For eighteen months Jerusalem was surrounded and held out against the in-

vading foe. The Egyptian aid that came to Zedekiah was quickly disposed of by the Babylonians and on the ninth day of Tammuz, about the middle of July in 586, the city wall was breached and the Babylonian army took possession of the city amid terrible slaughter and devastation. As was customary in those days, almost the entire population of the city was put in chains and taken into exile to Babylonia. Everything of value having been removed by the victorious soldiers, the Temple was burned and the king and his family were brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's sons were put to death in his presence, he himself was blinded and seventy of the most prominent men of Judea were killed by order of the Babylonian king. Jeremiah was given the choice of following the exiles to Babylon or of remaining with the poor and leaderless people in Judea. He chose to remain. Over this remnant, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor, and he was assassinated a few years later, thus leaving the land in a state of chaos, a prey to the marauding tribes round about them. Jeremiah was forced to follow the refugees to Egypt, where he probably died.

Thus the beginning of this great national calamity, the tenth day of Tebet; the day when the city was broken into, in the month of Tammuz; the day when the Temple was put to the flames, in the month of Ab; as well as the day when Gedaliah was assassinated, in the month of Tishri, were observed by the Babylonian exiles as days of mourning and fasting and are observed as such to the present time. Whether these days were kept as fast days also during the Second Commonwealth is not quite clear. They certainly assumed added weight and importance after the destruction of the second Temple at the hands of the Romans, nearly six centuries later. The old fast days were then revived and observed with increasing rigor, as the misfortunes of Israel increased.

2

THE SABBATH OF SONG

The weekly readings from the Torah in the synagogue have been widely followed by all Jews who often calculated dates, not after the months of the year, but in accordance with the Torah portion (*Sidra*) of the week. Thus letters would be dated as "the first of Noah" or "the second day of Balak," after the name of the section to be read in the synagogue the following Sabbath. Certain Sabbaths of the year were distinguished because of the importance of their Torah selection or of their prophetic selection. Thus we have in our calendar *Shabbat Hazon*, the Sabbath preceding Tisha b'Ab, and *Shabbat Nahamu*, the one immediately following it, the names taken from the *Haphtarahs* used on them. Similarly *Shabbat Shubah* is the name of the Sabbath coming between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, because the word *Shubah* occurs in the *Haphtarah* and because the word "return" or "repent" is timely for the penitential season. The four Sabbaths between the new moon of Adar and Passover are also designated by the names taken from the Torah readings on these occasions. The reason for the name of *Shabbat ha-Gadol* for the Sabbath immediately preceeding Passover is not quite clear, although that also may be based on a phrase found in the *Haphtarah* from Malachi on that Sabbath.

The Sabbath when the portion *Beshalah* (Exodus 13.17 to 17.16) is read, also bears a special name, *Shabbat Shirah* (song), because the Torah reading on this day contains the famous song that Moses and the children of Israel sang after their miraculous deliverance on the shores of the Red Sea. The prophetic reading on this day contains the song of Deborah and Barak whose prowess saved Israel from the

oppressive yoke of their Canaanite overlords when Sisera and his army met a crushing defeat at the hands of the army gathered together by Barak through the initiative of Deborah. The Jews of all ages loved to dwell on these narratives of the triumphs of their ancestors over the enemies who held them in bondage; such memories brought hope and comfort for their present troubles and persecutions. The recollection of these triumphs which were regarded as results of the direct intervention of God, as miraculous escapes from most imminent danger, inspired the Jews of all ages with added courage and faith, with the confidence that, just as Providence interceded in their behalf in former days, so it will come to their aid at any future time when tyrants oppress them and their enemies seek their destruction. The "Sabbath of Song," bringing to the fore two such divine intercessions, when the Damoclean sword, hanging so threateningly over the heads of the Jewish people, was removed, has been celebrated with cheer and hope because of the cheering message that it brought to Israel of all times.

The rabbis permitted their fantasy to go unrestrained in their homiletic interpretations of the Song of Moses. "The Song, notable for poetic fire, vivid imagery and quick movement, gives remarkable expression to the mingled horror, triumph and gratitude that the hosts of Israel had lived through during the fateful hours when they were in sight of Pharaoh's pursuing hosts" (Hertz). The rabbis saw in it a composite song in which Moses acted as leader and the Israelites joined in responses. The fragment of the song of Miriam attached to the narrative definitely points to a responsive chant in which Miriam and the women sang to the accompaniment of musical instruments. The complete faith of the women in the redemption of Israel from the Egyptian pursuers was evidenced by the fact that they

provided themselves with timbrels and with flutes with which they might celebrate the anticipated redemption. Not only did the men and the women of Israel join in the triumphal song, but even children and babes interrupted their play and joined in the singing. The rabbis further say that when the Egyptians were drowning in the Red Sea the angels were about to sing the glories of God, but they were silenced by the words "My creatures are drowning in the sea, and ye would indulge in songs!" However, other rabbis were of the opinion that the angels were restrained from singing because the priority was Israel's. A king upon his return from a victorious expedition was told that his son and his servant were waiting to present their greetings to him. Would he not wish to listen first to his son and then to his servant? The angels had to wait with the singing of their paeans not only for the men of Israel, but also until after the women had concluded their songs.

While all the Egyptians who followed Pharaoh were drowned when the waters of the sea returned, Pharaoh remained afloat and heard the Israelites burst forth in their song of jubilation. He was kept alive by the angel Gabriel and he was forced to acknowledge the greatness of the God of Israel of whom he said: "Who is the Lord that I should hearken to His voice?" Pharaoh stands at the gates of hell and, as the kings of the nations who oppressed Israel are about to enter, he chides them by ridiculing them because they had not taken a lesson from his fate as the result of his treatment of the people of God. "O ye fools, why have ye not learned knowledge from me?" is his greeting to the many tyrants that pass through the gates of hell where they are consigned to horrible punishment. This is what Miriam said to the women of Israel when she invited them to join with her in the song: "Let us sing unto the Lord for strength and sublimity are His; He rules over the mighty and He

hates presumption. He hurled Pharaoh's horses and chariots into the sea, because wicked Pharaoh in his presumption pursued God's people, Israel."

3

THE NEW YEAR FOR TREES

Palestine has a season of rain which lasts until about February, when the first buds of the trees become visible. The appearance of the budding trees was greeted with rejoicing and merrymaking and the first day of the month of Shebat, according to some authorities, or the fifteenth day of the month, according to others, was celebrated as the New Year for Trees, or the official Arbor Day. While the observance of the festival is not obligatory, it has generally been followed by Jews since ancient days, and has in our own days assumed new meaning and added significance with the revival of the national idea and the movement for the restoration of Palestine.

This festival was observed in the Middle Ages, and in more modern days in Eastern Europe, by partaking of fruits that grow in Palestine. The favorite fruit has been the dried carob, or St. John's Bread. The children were given a vacation from school and fruits were distributed among them. The kabbalists enumerated seventeen different kinds of fruit that should be partaken of on this day, in courses served while selections from the Bible and rabbinic literature pertaining to trees are recited. Stories about the vegetation of Palestine and about the miraculous power of the Palestinian soil which will be manifested in the days of the Messiah naturally were favorites on this day.

In ancient times, the main feature in the observance of the day was the planting of new trees. The Talmud tells of

a custom that existed in Jerusalem where a cedar tree was planted when a male baby was born and a cypress tree when a female child was born. When the children grew up and were to be married these trees or their branches were cut down and made into posts which were used for the nuptial canopy (*Huppah*). The respect for fruit trees is indicated in the biblical prohibition against cutting down a fruit tree, even in time of war (Deuteronomy 20.19). The rabbis permitted the cutting down of such trees only when space was needed for the building of a dwelling. It is related of R. Judah ha-Nasi, the compiler of the Mishnah, that he was in the habit of planting a "tree of joy" on Purim, but there is difference of opinion as to what kind of plant this was. The custom of planting trees on the fifteenth day of Shebat naturally fell into disuse after the Jews were forced out of Palestine and had ceased being an agricultural people. The eating of the fruit of the tree was then substituted as the symbol of the former significance of the day.

Trees were looked upon as symbols of what was good and noble in life. The righteous man is compared to the tree planted near a river, the fruit of which does not fail (Psalms 1.3). The reward of the righteous will be that he will flourish like a palm tree and remain firm like a cedar of Lebanon (ib. 92. 13-14).

In the early stages of the modern rejuvenation of Palestine, the planting of trees was undertaken with great enthusiasm, not merely because of the beauty that they lend, but also for practical reasons. The afforestation of Palestine is an absolute necessity for the rehabilitation of the land. The large waste lands that the early settlers found there contained pestiferous marshes, producing disease and all sorts of troubles which hampered them in their work. The planting of eucalyptus trees was the first act in the organization of any new colony, as these were found a

potent protection against malaria. Together with this, trees were also planted for ornamental purposes. The famous palm walk in Rishon l'Zion, introduced by the Jewish colonists, is regarded as one of the most idyllic spots in the colonies. Of course, the vine, the orange tree, the citron tree, and many another became the producers of staple articles in the colonies. Later on, forests were planted in different parts of the country and the tree donations to the Jewish National Fund proved to have a most popular appeal for the Jews of the diaspora as well as for those in Palestine.

Hamishah Asar (the fifteenth day of Shebat) is now celebrated by the Jewish colonists with elaborate ceremonies and the ancient custom of planting trees has been restored. Young people arrange processions in the city streets and in the colonies, carrying twigs and flowers and singing the songs of revival and restoration. To them *Hamishah Asar* has a symbolic significance of deep spiritual import. The New Year for Trees is gradually becoming a real festival in the land of our fathers and its significance becomes deeper with the extension of the Jewish settlements and with the spread of the national ideal. It is well that the Palestinian settlers revived this old Jewish festival expressive of their love of the soil with which they have so closely identified themselves. The celebration of the day in the diaspora is being made to serve the additional purpose of inducing Jews to use Palestinian products and thus aid in the development of Jewish colonization in Palestine and in identifying the Jews of all lands with the upbuilding of the National Home.

VI

PURIM (THE FEAST OF ESTHER)

PERSIA — LAND OF THE PURIM STORY

WHATEVER view we may entertain regarding the historicity of the events narrated in the Book of Esther, which form the basis of the Purim festival, there is no doubt that the author of the book laid his scene in ancient Iran and was familiar with the land and its inhabitants, even though he may have been inexact in some historical details. Jewish contacts with Persian life had been many since the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.), and possibly also before that. Among the places to which the people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were exiled by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, several have been identified as districts of Persia or of Media, which later became part of the Persian empire under Cyrus, in 550 B.C.E.

Zoroastrianism, the ancient Persian religion, has many points in common with Judaism, and modern scholars are not quite agreed as to whether the former was influenced by the latter or vice versa. The rabbis of the Talmud admitted that the system of angels and demons that gained prominence in Jewish belief and practice during the Second Commonwealth was borrowed from the Persians. The dualism of the Persian religion, the belief in two distinct deities, one having dominion over light and good, and the other over darkness and evil, definite protest against which is already found in the prophecies of Isaiah (45.7), is considered by many modern students as really a form of monotheism, since the Zoroastrian hope is that ultimately the power for good will triumph over its antagonist. The very fact that the early literature of Zoroastrianism speaks

derogatorily of Judaism is regarded as evidence of a contemporary relationship between these two great religions of antiquity.

When Cyrus conquered Babylonia in 539 B. C. E., the Jews, smarting under the yoke of the oppressor, breathed a sigh of relief, and their hope for restoration was revived. In the following year, probably through the intervention of Jewish notables, Cyrus issued his famous decree granting permission to the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild its ruins. This declaration was met by an outburst of jubilant utterances by the prophets of the time, who did not hesitate to acclaim Cyrus as the "Lord's Messiah," or anointed. Judea became rehabilitated through the pioneering work of the sturdy and faithful immigrants who left Babylon and settled in impoverished and devastated Palestine. The kings who succeeded Cyrus maintained in a measure the same benevolent attitude toward the Jews, and Judea continued as a Persian province for more than two centuries, until its conquest by Alexander the Great. The larger Jewish community that remained in Persia apparently enjoyed considerable freedom, and some of them even achieved wealth and high position in government circles. Xerxes, the son of Darius (485-465 B. C. E.), is identified by many with the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther, although others believe that the latter is to be identified with Artaxerxes II (404-361).

Greek rule over Persia lasted for only about seventy years, when the Parthians gained the supremacy and ruled Persia for about five centuries, a period which saw the destruction of Judea, the rise of the talmudic masters and the beginning of the numerous academies established in Babylon which successfully competed with their rivals in Palestine. In 226, the Parthians were driven out and the Sassanid dynasty, which was of pure Persian blood and firm upholders of the

Zoroastrian religion, was established. This dynasty, which continued in power until the Arab conquest in 651, was much more intolerant than its predecessors, and there are records of cruel persecutions of Jews and of Christians during this period. Still, the Jewish community continued to function as the premiere authoritative body for all Israel and maintained a large degree of autonomy, which persisted also during the Mohammedan period.

Afterwards and down to modern days, the Jews of Persia were subjected to many discriminations and humiliations under the fanatical Mohammedan sway. They were confined to ghettos, restricted in their occupations and dress and were regarded as pariahs. There are about 40,000 Jews in Persia under the more democratic form of government prevalent there at present, but even now they are never safe against the bigotry of the masses that may break out at any time.

2

SHUSHAN — SCENE OF THE PURIM STORY

In his exhaustive volume on *The Book of Esther in the Light of History*, Professor Jacob Hoschander establishes the historicity of the story of Esther which he places in the reign of Artaxerxes II in the early years of the fifth century B. C. E. The feast described in the first chapter of the Book of Esther which is said to have lasted for 180 days was, according to Hoschander, to celebrate the victory of the king over his brother, Cyrus, who wanted to wrest the throne from him and met his death in the struggle. Thus it was a somewhat belated celebration of the accession to the throne of Persia by Artaxerxes II. The 180 days of the celebration would correspond to the months of October through April, the winter months when the Persian kings, according to

Xenophon, resided in Shushan. After that, the king arranged a seven-day festival for the inhabitants of the town and on the seventh day the shameful order was issued by the king for Queen Vashti to appear before the assembled multitudes to display her charms and beauty, which she refused to do and for which she suffered the degradation which was the direct cause of the elevation of Esther to the throne. Shushan of the Bible or Susa of the Greeks is situated in the southwestern part of Persia, between the Shapur and the river of Disful. It was in ancient times the capital of Elam. An old legend has it that Shushan was the daughter of Elam, the oldest son of Shem and brother of Ashur, although a later legend gives the glory of the building of Shushan to one Shoshan-dukht, the Jewish queen of Jezdegerd I. About 647 B. C. E., the Assyrian army under Assurbanipal captured the city of Shushan and razed it to the ground, but it was apparently rebuilt later so that when Alexander the Great entered the city he found there a great deal of riches which he took with him. The site of old Shushan was excavated in 1850 and in subsequent years by several archaeologists and the ancient places of the Persian rulers, including the *Apadana* or audience-chamber (comp. Daniel 11.45) with its exquisite friezes of enameled brick were brought to light. Many of these remains are now stored in the Louvre, in Paris, or wherever these treasures are hidden now.

Shushan is also mentioned (Nehemiah 1.1) as the place where Nehemiah acted as chamberlain to the king and whence he departed on his mission to Judea. Another reference to Shushan "which is in the province of Elam" is found in Daniel (8.2) as the place where Daniel had a vision in the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. Tradition placed the Tomb of Daniel in the neighborhood of Shushan. Benjamin of Tudela, who visited the province about 1160,

gives some very interesting details regarding this traditional tomb which is supposed to have been close to one of the synagogues there. Because of the good fortune that the presence of the tomb brought to the inhabitants, there was a long standing quarrel between the people living on both sides of the river Choaspes; it finally resulted in a compromise which provided for the bier to remain alternately on each side for one year. This was later found to be disrespectful to the remains, and the Shah Sanjar ordered that the bier should be fastened by chains to the middle of the bridge where a chapel was erected. Fishing was prohibited within a mile of the bier and the local legend relates that goldfish were very abundant in its immediate vicinity. Frequent references are made to Daniel's tomb in Shushan in Mohammedan literature of the early period of Moslem penetration into Persia. Petahya of Regensburg, who visited Shushan in the latter part of the twelfth century, relates that he found there only two Jews. The province of Khuzistan in which Shushan is situated has in recent years had about 7,000 Jews. There were about fourteen synagogues, one of which still claims to be on the site of Daniel's burial place.

The narrative in the Book of Esther assumes Shushan to be the scene of all the incidents connected with the story. It was there that after the fall of Haman the Jews were permitted to take vengeance on their enemies and slew on the thirteenth day of Adar 500 people and on the following day 300 more. This summary punishment was carried out, according to the story, with the knowledge and consent of the king. The supposition is that Haman's decree provided for a pogrom on the Jews of Shushan for two days and in the rest of the provinces for one day. The preparations for this pogrom must have been all set through Haman's propaganda machinery and it was only through the infor-

mation given to the Jews and the permission to defend themselves against the projected onslaughts that the Jews could score a victory. Whether there were any Jewish casualties is not divulged, although it is unlikely that resistance by the enemy was lacking. Thus, the festival was observed in all other cities on the fourteenth, the day when fear of the attack no longer existed, and in Shushan both on the fourteenth and the fifteenth of Adar. Throughout subsequent ages, Purim has been observed on the fourteenth, although the fifteenth is also kept as Shushan Purim, when no festivities are prescribed but no mourning is permitted. The observance of Purim on the fifteenth of Adar was extended to apply not only to Shushan but also to all other walled cities that had their fortifications for a long time in the past, or as the rabbis put it, since the days of Joshua.

3

MORDECAI — HERO OF THE PURIM STORY

The name Mordecai is probably of Babylonian origin, indicating "belonging to Merodach, or Marduk," a Babylonian deity. The rabbis derive the name from two Aramaic words, denoting "pure myrrh," referring to Mordecai's nature and piety, as they do also with the names of his ancestors. He was the son of Jair, the one who "illuminated the eyes of Israel;" the son of Kish, because his knocks on the gates of heaven always met with a favorable response; the son of Shimei, whose prayers were always heard. In the brief genealogy of Mordecai given in the Book of Esther he is represented as having been descended from the tribe of Benjamin, closely related to King Saul. Haman is the scion of the last king of the Amalekites, Agag, who was killed by the prophet Samuel. We thus have the

descendant of Amalek opposed to the descendant of Saul, who was commissioned to blot out the memory of Amalek.

The festival of Purim is designated in the Second Book of Maccabees as the "Day of Mordecai," thus attributing to Mordecai the glory of the events narrated in the Book of Esther. The rabbis elaborated upon the virtues and self-sacrificing devotion of Mordecai to his people. When Esther was taken to Ahasuerus' harem, Mordecai enjoined upon her not to divulge her race or her faith, and this Esther observed in spite of all the efforts made by the king to learn her secret. Through his knowledge of many languages, on account of which he was also named Bilshan, Mordecai was able to learn of the plot against the king on the part of the two chamberlains. When Haman was elevated to the high position of Grand Vizier all the people paid homage to him by prostrating themselves before him. Mordecai alone would not bow before Haman.

When Haman came to fetch Mordecai in order to bestow upon him the honor of being led through the streets of Shushan, as a reward for his discovery of the plot against the king, Mordecai thought that surely now Haman had come to take his life and he ordered his disciples to depart quickly so that the punishment would not be meted out also to them. They, however, refused to leave him in the hour of distress and Mordecai again delivered a prayer to God. It was only after Haman's repeated explanations that Mordecai realized that Haman had not come to take his life, but rather to do him honor, as decreed by the king; and when Mordecai rode upon the king's horse, dressed in the royal garments and led by Haman, he intoned a song of exaltation and praise to God, to which his pupils responded in chorus. No sooner was this ceremony over, than Mordecai again put on his sackcloth and ashes and spent the rest of the day in prayer and fasting.

After the disgrace and fall of Haman, Mordecai suc-

ceeded to his place and the king sent out letters to all the provinces of his kingdom in which he rescinded the former decree regarding the destruction of the Jews and proclaimed the elevation of Mordecai and the high offices bestowed upon him. One third of the vast estate of Haman was given to Mordecai and he was made king of the Jews, a station that carried with it the privilege to mint coins which bore the figure of Esther on one side and that of Mordecai on the other. The fame of Mordecai spread throughout the Persian empire as the man next in rank to the king and as the protector of his people. Through his intervention and that of Esther the Festival of Purim was established as a feast day for all time and the Book of Esther made part of the sacred canon.

4

WHY MORDECAI REFUSED TO BOW BEFORE HAMAN

When King Ahasuerus raised Haman to high dignity and "set his seat above all the princes that were with him," the story relates that "all the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed down and prostrated themselves before Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not down nor prostrated himself before him." Mordecai's refusal to do honor to Haman was thus not merely an offense against Haman but also an act of treason against the king whose order he had violated. The custom of paying homage to men of authority by bowing and prostration was quite common in the Orient and is still in practice there among many tribes, so that Mordecai's refusal to follow the general custom appeared rather strange to the rabbis and to the Bible interpreters of later days. The example of Jacob and his family bowing before Esau

(Genesis 33.3) is recalled in this connection, for it should have served as a precedent to Mordecai. As the rabbis put it, Haman presented the argument to Mordecai himself, "Have not your ancestors bowed to my ancestors before?" To this Mordecai replied that his ancestor, Benjamin, had not yet been born at that time and therefore he was not bound by that precedent. This legendary conversation is hardly sufficient to account for the attitude of Mordecai which was the immediate cause of the great peril that faced the entire Jewish community of Persia.

Nor is the subtle distinction made by other commentators any more satisfying. They argue that the king's command applied only to his servants, meaning the menial servants attached to the court, but not to the princes and rulers. Mordecai, while not yet a ruler or a prince, did not regard himself as an ordinary servant and therefore believed that the command did not apply to him and that he was not breaking the royal order by abstaining from doing honor to the new dignitary. He had just saved the life of the king from a plot of conspirators and therefore should be considered as occupying a higher level than that of the ordinary servants. In reply to the remonstrances of the servants against his refusal to bow before Haman, the text adds the phrase "for he had told them that he was a Jew," which is rather irrelevant. The explanation is offered that Mordecai knew that his Jewishness prevented him from reaching the grade of a prince although he was fully entitled to such an elevation, but at the same time reasoned that he should not be classed with the lower type of servants from whom such obeisance was expected. This interpretation was apparently given under the influence of the medieval practice in accordance with which the Jews were regarded as "*servi camerae*," the direct property of the king, who would give them his protection, thus placing them in a peculiar category.

The rabbis of the Talmud were equally troubled by the problem of Mordecai's refusal to show honor to Haman and they interpreted it in a manner that corresponded to the milieu in which they lived. They said that Haman had the likeness of some idolatrous figure embroidered on his garments and all those who bowed before him actually expressed their adoration for the idol, and for this reason Mordecai refused to bow before him. This idea probably underlies the apocryphal prayer of Mordecai, included in the Greek Additions to the Book of Esther. In this prayer, Mordecai says: "Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman. For I could have been content with good will for the salvation of Israel to kiss the soles of his feet. But I did this, that I might not prefer the glory of man above the glory of God, neither will I worship any but thee, O God." The dilemma presented to Mordecai is further explained by them by the parable of the thirsty wolf who came to a well of water, around which he saw a net which the hunter had spread out for him. He said to himself, if I drink from the well I shall be caught in the net and if I do not drink I shall surely die of thirst. The Jews, too, are often exposed to the same dilemma which the nations of the world present to them. If they refuse to worship their gods the nations are bent upon destroying them, and if they agree to do so they forfeit their souls.

This rabbinic interpretation is the one usually accepted although it is strange that the text should have omitted to give the reason for Mordecai's behavior. It has even been suggested that Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was due to excessive pride on his part toward one who had been raised to a high position from the lowest ranks of society. Legend even makes Haman a former slave of Mordecai. This, however, was regarded as unworthy of a man like Mordecai, who should have known that his neglect

to do honor to the man whom the king placed in power might bring misfortune to him and to his people. The stress placed in the text on the fact that Mordecai was a Jew, and that Haman was moved to wreak his vengeance on all the Jews when they told him the people to which Mordecai belonged, would perhaps go to support the rabbinic interpretation that Mordecai's refusal was based on religious grounds. Israel's enemies of ancient days as well as of more modern times apparently held to the principle that every Jew is responsible for the action of every other Jew. They did not follow Abraham's example when he pleaded on behalf of the wicked people of Sodom: "Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (Genesis 18.23), or that of Moses pleading on behalf of the people in the case of Korah "Shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?" (Numbers 16.22). Mordecai's apparent haughtiness may not be justified, but Haman's diabolical plan to destroy the entire Jewish people because of that could not be permitted to succeed.

5

QUEEN ESTHER IN RABBINIC LEGEND

The rabbis, living closer than we to the incidents narrated in the Book of Esther, entertained no doubts regarding their accuracy or reality. To them, Esther was a real person, a heroine possessed of deep love for her people and her religion, virtuous and courageous. Her name was Hadassah, meaning myrtle, and the rabbis found in the myrtle many traits of virtue which they applied to Esther. As the myrtle pervades the air of its surroundings with a sweet and pleasant fragrance so Esther brought happiness and joy to all who came in contact with her, and her good deeds spread

her virtues abroad. But the myrtle, while giving forth a pleasant scent, is bitter to the taste; so Esther, too, while pleasant and agreeable to those dear to her, proved a very bitter person to Haman and his followers. The name Esther, which they related to a Hebrew root, meaning to hide, signifies that she was able to hide from Ahasuerus her origin and descent, as her relative, Mordecai, had commanded her.

Esther was of medium size and had no particularly striking features. In fact, some of the rabbis gave her even a sallow complexion, much like the appearance of the myrtle. Her attractiveness consisted in her exceptional charm and grace. With her charm she bewitched not only Ahasuerus but also all the eunuchs of his harem. Even her rivals for the hand of the monarch were so captivated by her charm that they freely assisted her in adorning herself before she approached the royal presence. Esther herself wanted no artificial aids for increasing her beauty, and the King's chamberlain, Hegai, was exasperated lest he be held responsible for the lack of cosmetics and ornaments on her person. He was particularly worried over the fact that she ate so little, as she would not partake of any forbidden food. She selected as her attendants seven Jewish maidens, who were as careful about the dietary laws as she was. In order that she might not lose count of the days and thus neglect to observe the Sabbath, she named her seven maidens in a manner that each, on the day when she was on duty, reminded her of the day of the week. Raguatas, meaning rest, was the name of the maid who attended her on the Sabbath day.

The reason why Mordecai ordered her not to divulge her origin is variously interpreted by the rabbis. In the first place he did not want to profit by his relationship to her. The King might wish to raise him to a high position in the

state after he learned of his relationship to the Queen; and this Mordecai desired to avoid. Then, Mordecai was not so certain that the fate that had befallen Vashti might not also befall Esther, through the capriciousness of the volatile monarch. Fearing that in such an eventuality, the King's anger might urge him to avenge himself on the entire nation to which Esther belonged, Mordecai thought it best to conceal the descent of Esther. If Esther was to be sacrificed there was no need of imperilling the whole Jewish community. Esther remained unmoved by the entreaties and even the threats of the King and would tell him nothing of her former life, beyond the fact that her father had died before she was born and her mother died at the time she was born.

When Haman's decree for the destruction of the Jews became known to Mordecai, the latter appealed to Esther to intercede with the King. It happened to be just before Passover, when fasting is not permitted. Esther and her attendants nevertheless fasted for three consecutive days and all Israel joined her in her prayers for success in her mission. Although weakened by her long fast, Esther put on her best garments, placed her crown on her head and golden shoes on her feet and, supported by two maids, proceeded to the chambers of the King. It was a risky thing for her to do, and all the chamberlains who saw her pass were certain that the death penalty was awaiting her. She instantly met with the King's favor, who said to her that he would grant any request that she might make, except one for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, since he had promised several of the princes hostile to the Jews that he would not allow this. Esther was so overwhelmed by the kindness of the King to her that she was unable to utter her petition and only asked that the King and Haman attend the banquet which she had prepared for them. She also had some cogent reasons for delaying the matter,

wishing to arouse the jealousy of the King and the other princes. She also wanted the Jews not to rely upon her, but on the goodness of God. In her denunciation of Haman during the second feast, she was greatly aided by angels who came down to give her assistance in her hazardous undertaking.

It was at her pleading with the elders of Israel that the feast of Purim became an established festival in the Jewish calendar. The sages also did not wish to include the Book of Esther in the Bible, until after Esther had convinced them that the document was deserving of a place in the sacred canon, and this was later confirmed by a heavenly pronouncement.

6

AHASUERUS, KING OF PERSIA

The recent discoveries, made by excavators for the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, have brought to light three new stone tablets of the reign of Xerxes. These finds have encouraged Bible students and historians to hope that in the course of time the identity of Ahasuerus, the king of the Book of Esther, may be more definitely established. The tablets were found stored in a room of Xerxes' army garrison east of the Great Palace Terrace at Persopolis, designated as the Versailles of ancient Persia. Although seven such tablets were unearthed, only three contain material that is new to historians. In these Xerxes relates his success, early in his reign, in suppressing enemies of the religion of Zoroaster. The translation of these tablets was made by Dr. Ernst Herzfeld. Several gold and silver plaques of the time of Darius, father of Xerxes, had been discovered in the same place some time ago and were presented to the Shah of Iran. It is not im-

possible that other documents may eventually be found which may shed more light on the strange incidents recorded in the Book of Esther.

Biblical scholars have been at variance regarding the authenticity of the facts which the festival of Purim commemorates, and concerning the place of the various characters and events of the story in the history of Persia as known to us. Some have been inclined to regard the entire story as a romance, without any foundation in fact, while others assumed that it was a fictional elaboration of an incident in the history of the Jews under the Persian dominion. The main difficulty is in identifying the chief character of the story, King Ahasuerus, who is represented as a vain, foolish and hot-tempered monarch. The name itself is sufficiently similar in pronunciation to the Persian name of Xerxes to give foundation to the general opinion which identifies the two, and which would make the story of Purim synchronous with the reign of Xerxes (485-465 B. C. E.). However, the ancient Greek version of the Bible, the Septuagint, and Josephus, speak of Ahasuerus as Artaxerxes, referring to the king by that name, who ruled over Persia from 404 to 359 B. C. E.

The rabbis are quite hazy about the historical background of the story, and often indulge in fanciful theories in an endeavor to reconcile its contradictory and conflicting statements. One rabbi declared Ahasuerus a wise ruler, while another made of him a simpleton and an idiot. The description of his dominion as including one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, "from India even unto Ethiopia," would fit any of the Persian rulers of the period, as Persia was actually then the dominant power in the entire civilized world. In the inscription referred to above, Xerxes speaks of himself as "the king of kings," "an Aryan of an Aryan lineage," and enumerates the provinces that are

tributary to him, including "the Ionians that dwell in the sea and those that dwell beyond the seas," which would imply that this was written before his defeat in the battle of Salamis (480 B. C. E.). The cruelty and licentiousness of Ahasuerus, which made a theme for considerable elaboration by the rabbis, would fit any of the ancient Persian monarchs. While the Greek historians who paint these Persian kings in the blackest of colors cannot always be relied upon, as the antagonisms between the two nations were too keen to permit of objective truth, much of the moral obliquities and lustful acts mentioned by them are probably correct, and these were not confined to any one of the kings. The fact that in the Book of Esther, Ahasuerus is lost to view between the third and seventh year of his reign is regarded as corroborating the identity with Xerxes, as it was during that period that he was engaged in his fruitless invasion of Greece.

By some strange coincidence, the legend of the Wandering Jew, that has been current throughout the Middle Ages, gives Ahasuerus as the name of the shoemaker who was condemned to live forever as a wanderer. The legend relates that when Jesus was on his way to the crucifixion, a Jewish shoemaker in Jerusalem taunted him to take more rapid steps. Jesus replied: "I go, but tarry thou till I come." This was taken as a curse pronounced upon him that he will be forced to wander about until the second coming of Jesus, and numerous works were built on the basis of this legend. But why the name of Ahasuerus should be given to this offender is not clear.

7

HAMAN IN LEGEND AND RITUAL

Modern Jew-baiters provide for the future historian ample data of their lives and activities in biographies written either by themselves or by their underlings. We have no such records of our ancient adversary, Haman the Agagite. The narrative in the Bible mentions only the fact that he was "the son of Hammedatha the Agagite," and that he was raised by King Ahasuerus to the position of chief minister, without giving the reason for his promotion. Tradition makes him a descendant of the nation of Amalek, whose last king, Agag, was destroyed by Samuel (I Samuel 15.32-33). The same tradition enumerates sixteen generations that have elapsed from the time of Saul to the time of Mordecai, both described as scions of the tribe of Benjamin. The Greek version omits the gentile appellation and in one place makes of Haman a Macedonian.

Dr. Hoschander, in his elaborate essay, *The Book of Esther in the Light of History*, endeavors to prove that Haman was not at all the obscure person the rabbis declare him to be, but a person of considerable ability, who was, in the reign of Artaxerxes II, the author of a comprehensive plan for the reform of the Zoroastrian religion. His hatred of the Jews was not a mere caprice, but was based on religious prejudices and had political implications. The rabbis, however, held no such high opinion of Haman's antecedents and powers. They made of him a barber, a bath-attendant, a groom and even a slave serving Mordecai, to whom he had sold himself when he was in great distress. When elevated to the high position by the king, Haman surrounded himself with a large number of advisers, but the advice of none of them was as sound as that of his wife, Zeresh. Rabbinic tradition dwells especially on his vainglory and his excessive love of self.

Haman has always been regarded as the prototype of the enemies of Israel. Jewish folklore and custom combined to keep his memory alive for eternal shame. Children were taught to despise the memory of Haman, and were encouraged to give expression to their feelings in the synagogue while the *Megillah* was being read. Several kinds of noise-producing devices have been developed which children use whenever the name of Haman is mentioned, and his name occurs quite frequently in the Book of Esther. In the early Middle Ages, the custom prevailed of burning Haman in effigy on Purim. In a Gaonic responsum, published by Professor Ginzberg, it is described in the following manner: The custom in Babylon was for the young men to make an effigy of Haman and hang it on one of the roofs of the town for four or five days before Purim, and on Purim day, a large bonfire was made into which the effigy was thrown, while the young men sang songs and indulged in gymnastic feats like swinging over the fire without touching it. In France, there was a custom for boys to engrave the name of Haman on smooth stones; on Purim they would rub the stones one against the other until the name was entirely obliterated. This was the manner in which the Jews "wreaked vengeance" on their arch-enemy.

8

HARBONAH

The role of Harbonah in the Esther drama is of minor importance, hardly deserving of the liturgist's plea that he, "too, should be remembered for good." He was the third in order of the seven eunuchs of the court of Ahasuerus to whom the order was given to bring Vashti before the assembled guests, during the festivities celebrating the king's

accession to the throne, in order to display her beauty and her charms. He is again mentioned later in the story when Haman's discomfiture came at the hands of Esther and the king's displeasure with him was at its height. Harbonah then informed Ahasuerus that Haman had prepared a gallows for Mordecai who had that very day been honored by the king for the act of fidelity which he had manifested in connection with the abortive plot against the king's life. The order was then given that Haman should be hanged on the gallows which he had built for Mordecai and it was only when this order was carried out that the anger of the king subsided.

Dr. Jacob Hoschander works up an apparently reasonable thesis which makes of Harbonah quite an important agent in the drama of the story of Purim. The narrative tells of Esther grasping the favorable moment to expose Haman as the enemy of the king, but does not mention specifically what charges she could have brought against him which would make him deserving of the death penalty. The fact that he had plotted against the destruction of the Jewish community could not in itself have been sufficient to condemn him, since this was done with the knowledge and approval of the king and for the alleged welfare of the state. To the charge made by Esther against Haman the king made no reply, but arose in anger from his couch and went out to the garden while Haman remained to plead with the queen for his life, "for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." When the king returned from his walk he found Haman in a compromising position, perhaps holding the queen's hands while imploring her to withdraw her charges. The infuriated king then exclaimed: "Will he even force the queen before me in the house?" Haman was confounded and did not even attempt to offer any excuse or explanation which might have saved his life. His silence was an admission of his guilt and his fate was

sealed. Hoschander explains this anomaly by rendering the phrase usually translated "they covered Haman's face," the symbol of condemnation to death, to mean that Haman had swooned and was thus unable to stand up for his rights and ask for justice. At this moment, Harbonah, probably a Jewish eunuch, interposed to tell the king that Haman had prepared a gallows on which to hang the man who had saved the king's life and who had been rewarded by the king for this act that very day. This surely constituted high treason and the order was given for his execution. Without Harbonah's charge, Haman might have been placed under arrest and given an opportunity to prove his innocence before a court of law. "The downfall of Haman was really effected by the Jewish eunuch Harbonah."

The rabbinic Agada is not quite as complimentary to Harbonah. There he is represented as having been a friend and an accomplice of Haman in his plot to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews of the Persian empire. When, however, he saw that the king's anger was aroused against Haman and that his downfall was imminent, he divulged to the king that Haman had been implicated in the plot against his life by Bigthan and Teresh and that ever since that time he had nurtured his enmity against Mordecai, waiting for the opportunity to do away with him who may have known of his share in that plot. The popular saying that "once the ox has been cast to the ground, slaughtering knives can be easily found" was applied by the rabbis to Harbonah's part in the doom of Haman. The revelation of Haman's aim to get rid of Ahasuerus and perhaps later become his successor was the real reason for the death penalty imposed upon him.

Haman was hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai at the suggestion of his wife, Zeresh. The gallows was made out of the wood of a thorn-bush. The

rabbis relate how God had assembled all the various trees and asked them which one would permit its wood to be used as the one on which Haman should be hanged. All of them expressed their readiness to serve, and they all received God's blessing for it, but the offer of the thorn-bush was accepted. The claim made by it was: "I am fitted to do this service, for the ungodly are like pricking thorns." Upon the same gallows were hanged also the ten sons of Haman, and the rabbis went into great detail to set down the exact space occupied by each on the gallows which was fifty cubits high. Another version has it that it was really the prophet Elijah who appeared before the king in the guise of Harbonah and effected the destruction of Haman. "And Harbonah, too, should be remembered for good," with which the Purim hymn concludes, is thus fully justified.

9

PURIM PRANKS

Devoid of any religious significance, the Purim festival has been the one carefree, jovial and hilarious day in the Jewish calendar. Whatever its origin, Purim has become in Jewish tradition the day of festivity almost to the point of abandon. The regular routine of life was not interfered with, labor was permitted and all business transactions continued as usual, but in the Jewish quarters in the Middle Ages, and even close to our own days, there was an atmosphere of joy and play which penetrated the home, the synagogue and even the market place.

All kinds of capers, practical jokes and freakish antics were permitted and encouraged, and the Jews were not particular as to the origin of these frolics, borrowing some even from their Catholic neighbors who celebrated their gay carnival about the same season of the year.

The revelry began in the synagogue, during the reading of the *Megillah* (the Book of Esther) in the evening. The tradition that Haman was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites, the first enemy that the Jews encountered, is probably the basis for the custom of "beating Haman." This consists in shouting and banging and producing all kinds of noise whenever the name of Haman is mentioned.

The order given to the Israelites (Deuteronomy 25.19) to "wipe out the memory of Amalek" gave rise to the various customs of the *Haman-klopper*, the *Grogger*, and other such noise-making instruments used to blot out the name of Haman. In some communities it was customary for people to inscribe Haman's name on the soles of their shoes and then to stamp their feet violently whenever the name was mentioned until the inscription would be worn away. Children were encouraged to provide themselves with all such instruments, even toy pistols.

The custom, in one form or another, seems to be widespread among Jews in all lands. The more dignified and phlegmatic Sephardic Jews of London frowned upon this custom which interfered with the decorum of the service. In his *History of the Bevis Marks Synagogue* of London, the late Dr. Moses Gaster gives a translation from the original Spanish of a ruling (*Ascama*) passed by the congregational Board forbidding the making of a noise "with a hammer or any other instrument" and fixing the penalty for the breach of this enactment at twenty pounds sterling.

The Sephardim of London had to satisfy themselves with a boo or a hiss when the name of Haman was mentioned, if they did not want to incur the displeasure of the *Mahamad* and the financial loss this would involve.

The burning of Haman in effigy has become confined to Jews in Moslem countries since Christians might see in the custom a reference to the crucifixion of Jesus. Weeks before Purim, the youth of the community would distribute the

work of preparing the effigy among themselves, some making arms, others legs, hands, head and body. Garrets and cellars would be ransacked for rags of many colors and designs which might enter into the pattern.

On the afternoon of the festival the finished product would be carried ceremoniously to the market place and, with or without a formal trial, the verdict would be carried out amidst shouting and merrymaking. In Persia, to this day, the children erect a gallows in a courtyard and the effigy is first hung up on it and then oil is poured over it and a bonfire made accompanied by jeers and dancing.

The "Purim-Rabbi" was the source of the greatest frolic among the students of the *Yeshibahs*. Probably in imitation of the Jester-Pope in connection with the carnival, the "Purim-Rabbi" was given considerable latitude in his criticism of the teachers and leaders of the community. His address was replete with witty allusions to biblical and midrashic phrases and his satire directed against the ruling powers in town was biting and merciless. It is probably out of this custom that the rich literature of parody has grown up around Purim.

The drama which became a feature of importance in later times made it necessary for the actors (*Purim Spieler*), who were always men, to don women's garb when representing Vashti, Esther or Zeresh. This was particularly displeasing to the rabbis of Poland, who vainly sought to stop it. Popular sentiment favored the actors and they won out in the end.

No great dramatic masterpiece emerged out of these efforts, but both young and old enjoyed these bizarre and often ludicrous presentations of scenes from the Book of Esther or from the early patriarchal period. All care and worry was forgotten and everybody joined the sport with gusto, a marvelous tonic to a saddened and oppressed people.

PURIM PARODIES

Already in Talmudic times the festival of Purim was observed with much hilarity and merrymaking. The staid and grave rabbis of the Talmud urged the indulgence in drink on that day to the extent that one should be unable to distinguish between "Cursed be Haman" and "Blessed be Mordecai." Although the more serious-minded rabbis of a later age ingeniously explained this anomalous injunction to refer to the fact that the Hebrew words "Cursed be Haman" have the same numerical value as the words for "Blessed be Mordecai," the law was taken literally by all succeeding generations of Jews, so that the civil law provides that one who was in his cups on Purim and caused damage to somebody else's property could not be held responsible, since his drunkenness was legitimate. In the exuberance of rejoicing on that day, many of the ceremonial laws were relaxed and the synagogue was often permitted to be converted into a place of unbridled indulgence in all kinds of pranks and frivolities. The close intimacy that existed between the Jew and the synagogue permitted of such behavior without interfering with the innate reverence for the house of worship, which was deep-seated and universal.

This intimacy and apparent disrespect for things sacred manifested itself particularly in the numerous parodies that have been prepared for Purim from earliest times until the last century. Nothing was too sacred for the parodist to imitate and lampoon. The Bible, the Mishnah, the Gemara, the prayer book and the Passover *Haggadah*, every form of liturgical expression, the penitential prayers of the High Holy Days (*Selihot*), the *Hallel*, the *Piyyutim* and even the

elegies for the Ninth of Ab (*Kinot*) and many others, were used as models for these parodies, the main theme being the indulgence in strong drink and the regulations for boisterous enjoyments. Such irreverent plays on words as the conversion of *Hallelujah*, "Praise ye the Lord," into *Hallelu-Yayin*, "Praise ye the wine," or of the name Habakuk the prophet into *Habakkuk*, the Bottle, were resorted to freely, and even the *Kiddush* and *Habdalah* prayers for Sabbath and holidays did not escape the searching eye of the parodist in his quest for models for his satiric productions. Only those who are at home in the literature of the rabbis are able to appreciate the subtlety of wit and the biting sarcasm of these parodies, many of which displayed a fine sense of humor and clever ingenuities in the application of the talmudic form of reasoning and debate to the frivolous subjects under discussion.

The earliest and most important Purim parodies were produced by Jews of France and Italy at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Israel Davidson, in his *Parody in Jewish Literature*, established the fact that the famous treatises on Purim were the works of such well known philosophers and thinkers as Kalonymos of Rome, and of Levi ben Gerson, of Bagnoles, France. The *Maseket Purim* by Kalonymos is probably the best known and most widely circulated of this type of parody. It follows the style of the Talmud, including both *Halachah* and *Agada*, and even retains some of the names of the talmudic Amoraim as the speakers in this playful manner in the solemn style and manner of the Talmud. The author concludes his work by warning his readers that "it was written in mere fun, to amuse people on Purim," and justifying it by tradition "that whoever has no share in the pleasures of this life will have no share in the pleasures of the life to come." The later Purim parodies, while based on that of Kalonymos, were much more akin to the talmudic style and some of

them even have commentaries after the style of Rashi, Tosaphot and of the later commentators on the Talmud. The names of the rabbis are mostly fashioned after Hebrew words meaning drunkenness, gluttony, laziness and similar expressions. Rabbi Bottle, Rabbi Cask, Rabbi Sot and other such names are the main figures in these parodies. The passion for wine and strong drink is carried to the most ludicrous absurdities. Rabbi Old Wine, while drinking on Purim, would fall on his knees and lick up from the ground any drop that might have fallen from the cup. When Rabbi Drunkard went to sleep on the night of Purim, he suspended a bottle of wine over his head from which the wine dripped into his mouth the whole night. All water must be removed from the Jewish premises on the eve of Purim, even as all leaven is removed from the house before Passover. Why did Isaac's eyes become dim in his old age? Because he busied himself with the digging of wells of water and did not plant any vineyards. Noah was saved from the flood because he was destined to plant a vineyard and become intoxicated with the wine. Another favorite figure was that of Lot, whose drunkenness is mentioned in the Bible.

In this manner the Jewish student, devoted all the time to the serious and sedate occupation of studying the intricacies of talmudic lore, permitted himself on this day some relaxation and indulged in what seems to us an irreverent mimicry of sacred things, speaking soberly of the delights of drink and allowing himself the pleasure of caricaturing the things which he held in the highest esteem.

11

PURIM DELICACIES

The manner of observing the festival of Purim is described simply in the letter which Mordecai sent to all the Jews who "were in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus"

(Esther 9.30). In this letter he enjoins upon them to make the day a festival, a day of "feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor." The word for "feasting" is *Mishteh*, which literally means "drink," since in those good old days a feast without wine and other beverages was unthinkable.

The feasting prescribed for Purim gave rise to a distinct form of cooking and baking among medieval Jews. The feasting was continued until late at night. This was known as *Seudat Purim*, and it was during this meal that the amateur actors appeared at the homes of the more wealthy and displayed their histrionic abilities before the assembled guests. The pious housewives vied with one another in the creation of the most original and the most palatable dishes for the occasion. An Italian parodist of the fourteenth century enumerates twenty-four different dishes that were served at the Purim festive table. Among these are included all kinds of viands prepared of meats and pastries, which the author had to designate by their Italian names, since the Hebrew had not produced words for the different concoctions. The German Jews had a number of cakes and pastries, to which they gave specific names, mainly associated with the story of the festival. Thus we have the *Haman-taschen* (Haman's Pockets) and the *Hamanohren* (Haman's Ears) besides a number of other delicacies which bore no specific designation. *Kreppchen* (dough pockets filled with chopped meat and used in soup) has become a universal dish on Purim among Jews of all of Eastern Europe.

The custom of *Mishloah Manot*, to send gifts one to another, may have contributed to the development of a special Purim culinary art. This custom had become during the Middle Ages, and even until recently one of the most characteristic features in the observance of the feast. The gifts consisted mainly of articles of food, especially delicacies of all kinds, which were usually arranged and

supervised by the women of the household. It was certainly to the glory of the housewife to surprise her friend with some dainty which her genius had invented; and this gave rise to many original preparations. Immediately after the reading of the *Megillah* in the evening — and the women regarded themselves obliged to listen to the reading, since the chief character in the story was a woman — the housewives would repair to the kitchen and begin their preparations for the next day. Not infrequently this work occupied the greater part of the night and all the younger members of the family were pressed into service. The gifts were usually deposited on large plates, covered with napkins and sent by young boys, who received their tips in every house which they visited. The temptation to tamper with the contents of the plate was very great and it required unusual strength of character for the boy to withstand it. This weakness on the part of the messengers was not unknown to the adults and due allowance was made for that in the arrangement and selection of the viands.

The injunction to distribute charity on this day was also often carried out in the sending of food of a more substantial nature to the poor. The law makes it obligatory upon every Jew, even the poorest, to give something to charity on this day and regular collections were made in the synagogues for that purpose. The pious housewives, however, were not satisfied with the money that their husbands may have given to charity, and sought to supplement it by contributing their share towards making the poor more cheerful on the festival. Each had her special protégé to whom she would send certain portions of all the dishes that she had prepared for her own table. Invitations were extended to some of the more respectable poor to come to the house and partake of the main meal in the family circle.

MASQUERADING ON PURIM

There is no mention either in the Talmud or in the early rabbinic writings of the very widespread custom of masquerading on Purim, and it is quite likely that the custom did not come into vogue until the Middle Ages. It is hardly known among Oriental Jews, and most historians trace it back to the similar carnival practices that held sway in most Catholic countries, especially in Italy, which in turn are traced to the Roman Saturnalia of pagan times. This ancient pagan custom, accompanied by bacchanalian feasts when libertinism and licentiousness were indulged in by all classes of society, could not be abolished by the representatives of Christianity who gave it instead a semi-religious character. The term "carnival," meaning "a solace of the flesh," is a Christian term, associating the festivities with the excessive indulgence in meat foods in preparation for the Lent season. In the fifteenth century, the Jews of Rome were compelled to pay an annual tax of 1130 gold florins, the thirty being added as a special memorial for Judas Iscariot and his thirty pieces of silver, toward the upkeep of the carnival. Jews also participated in the races, which formed part of the festivities. The proximity of the Lenten season to Purim makes plausible the supposition that the merrymaking, and especially the masquerading connected with the Jewish festival, were borrowed from the carnival.

The masquerading on Purim involved the wearing of men's clothes by women and those of women by men. Although biblical law (Deuteronomy 22.5) prohibits such practice, probably on moral grounds, the rabbis were more lenient on this point and permitted the exchange of garments on this occasion when it was intended to arouse mirth and to bring cheer. The permission was by no means unani-

mous, and some of the more austere rabbis inveighed against the practice. "Every one who fears God will exhort the members of his household, and those who defer to his opinions, to avoid such frivolities," is the warning of a sixteenth-century rabbi, but the people gave no heed to these warnings, and indulged in the exchange of garments on the festival of Purim. For the most part, the masquerades took the form of a parody on the story of Purim, boys and girls dressing up as Haman, Mordecai, Esther or Vashti, and even Zeresh, Haman's wife, and his daughter, whose name is not mentioned in the Bible. Adults, too, would dress up in grotesque fashion, and go about from house to house, causing much merriment and fun among the companies assembled around the festive table in the evening. Beggars, including at times also non-Jewish mendicants, would make the occasion a source of revenue for themselves.

The joy which the Jews found in the celebration of Purim is quite natural and understandable. Haman was to them the type of Jew-baiter with whom they were too well acquainted, and his downfall represented to them an augury and a promise of what would happen to their oppressors in their own times. They thus abandoned themselves on that day to all kinds of merrymaking, partly of their own devising and partly borrowed from the customs of their neighbors. They permitted themselves the luxury of making sport of some of the things which they otherwise held sacred, and to deviate from the rigors of life to which they otherwise submitted without question. The rabbi, the most respected person in the community, was lampooned by a caricature which was not always elegant in speech or suave in manner. The exchange of garments to make people appear different from what they were was not always accompanied by the wearing of masks. The mask

was probably a much later invention, when people had become more conscious of themselves and somewhat ashamed of the burlesque dress and the infantile tricks they were supposed to perform, and were led to cover their faces so as to avoid recognition by their friends. The masquerade was probably the forerunner of the Purim play, based on the story of Esther, or on some other incidents in Bible history. The mummers, seeking for some manner of expression while displaying their ludicrous garbs, resorted to the presentation of scenes familiar to their audiences. In more modern times the play entirely displaced the masquerade, and even that became confined to the religious school and to the participation of children. A revival of the old custom of masquerading and its accompanying carnival features has been attempted in the all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv, where Purim is being celebrated with all the historic paraphernalia that accompanied it throughout the ages.

13

FAMILY AND LOCAL PURIMS

The lesson derived from the story of Purim, that a special Providence guards the destinies of Israel, has so deeply impressed itself upon the consciousness of the Jewish people that they often applied the name of Purim to marvelous rescues from danger of small groups and even of individuals. In many cases, the entire mode of celebrating Purim, even including the fast day preceding it, was adopted in the commemoration of such communal or individual redemptions, whether from the hands of a human enemy or from such natural calamities as conflagrations, plagues or inundations. The occasion is remembered by the community or by the family of the individual by reading a special *Megillah*

prepared by the contemporaries of the event; by abstaining from all work and by indulging in enjoyments of various kinds. Steinschneider, the great bibliographer of the past generation, could enumerate 22 such special Purims, while the Jewish Encyclopedia names half a dozen more that were discovered since. Although most of them pertain only to special communities or families, they are valuable for the student of Jewish history and reveal to us the state of mind, the constant uncertainty and anxiety, as well as the deep faith in a kind Providence that protects and watches over Israel, that permeated the lives of our ancestors throughout the ages.

A typical example of this kind of Purim is that known as the Purim of Saragossa, observed on Shebat 18, in memory of a miracle that occurred in that Spanish town in 1380 or 1420. A converted Jew denounced the Jews of Saragossa to the king charging that their representatives welcomed him with empty cases, from which the Torahs had been removed. The charge was true, since the rabbis had ordered the removal of the scrolls as a safeguard against their desecration. On the night of another parade, when the Jews were scheduled to meet the king with the Torahs, the prophet Elijah appeared in a dream to all the beadles of the twelve synagogues of the town and warned them to keep the scrolls in their cases. This was done. When the parade started and the king's guards examined the cases and found them to contain the Torahs, the informer was hanged and the Jews of the town, as well as their descendants through many centuries after the event, although exiled to various other lands, kept the day as a Purim and celebrated it by repeating the story and by special festivities in their homes.

The Purim of Shiraz commemorates a similar event when the Jewish community of that Persian town was miraculously saved from a great peril in the early Middle Ages. A

Jewish butcher, who was accused of having sold non-kosher meat to his Jewish customers, embraced Mohammedanism and accused the Jews of numerous crimes, in order to evade the anger of his townsmen. The Jews were given the choice between death and the adoption of Islam, and most of them chose the latter. On the second day of Heshvan, the butcher suddenly died and in his garments a statement was found in which he retracted all his charges against the Jews, who were thereupon permitted to return to Judaism. That day, therefore, became a holiday in that community, known as *Moed Katan* or the *Purim of Moed Katan* (Minor Festival).

The most characteristic family Purim is that enjoined on the descendants of Yom Tob Lipmann Heller, who was chief Rabbi of Prague in 1627. Forced to preside at the meeting which had to apportion the heavy taxes imposed upon the Jewish community because of the Thirty Years' War, Heller gained for himself many influential enemies who charged him with favoritism in allotting the taxes to different members of the community. He was accused before the Emperor of having written against Christianity and ordered to appear in Vienna before a special tribunal. He was found guilty because he defended the Talmud. His sentence of death was later commuted by the Emperor to the payment of a large sum of money to the treasury. After a confinement in prison for forty days, he was released upon the payment of the first instalment of the fine. He returned to Prague in broken health, but stayed there for a short time only. In 1632 he became rabbi of Nemirov in Russia and in 1643 was called to the rabbinate of Cracow, where he died in 1654. In the *Megillah* which he wrote, in which he gives the details of all his troubles, he enjoined upon his family to observe the fifth day of Tammuz, the day when his troubles began, as a fast day, and the first day of Adar, the day when he was installed as rabbi of Cracow, as a Purim,

a day of rejoicing and merrymaking. He writes that he hesitated to have his Purim following immediately upon the fast day, since at that time he was still in danger of his life.

Most of the special Purims were instituted during the later Middle Ages and some of them even as late as the early part of the past century.

VII
PASSOVER

THE MONTH OF NISAN AND THE CHRISTIAN EASTER

IN THE Bible the month of Nisan is called *Abib* (greening) referring to the ripening of the early barley, but later the Babylonian name Nisan (flowering, budding) was given to the month. While the New Year in ancient times was reckoned from the autumn (Tishri), Nisan was looked upon as the first month of the year, and it is so designated in the law regarding the observance of Passover. The entire month is observed as a minor festival, during which no fasting is permitted and the supplication in the daily service (*Tahanun*) is omitted.

The month of Nisan is traditionally important for still other reasons. The anniversaries of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, of Miram and also of Joshua occur during this month. Once in every solar cycle, that is, every twenty-eight years, counting from the traditional year of creation, a special service of blessing the sun (*Birkat ha-Hammah*) is prescribed for the fourth day of the month of Nisan.

The importance attached to Nisan is undoubtedly due to the fact that it is the month during which the Passover festival is celebrated. On the tenth of the month, as was commanded (Exodus 12.2) to the Israelites in Egypt on the eve of the Exodus, every householder was required to set aside a lamb for the paschal offering, and groups were formed for the proper celebration of the festival on the night of the fourteenth. The lamb or kid, which had to be male, one year old, and free from all blemish, was killed in the court of the temple in the afternoon, while the levites

chanted the *Hallel*. Some of its blood was sprinkled by the priest on the altar, while the entire lamb was roasted and consumed by the family group at the evening meal (*Seder*), when the story of the Exodus was related to the assembled guests. Every member of the group was obliged to partake of the lamb and nothing thereof could be left over for the following day. On the sixteenth of the month, the second day of Passover, the first sheaf of barley was offered in the Temple and from then the seven weeks began to be counted, day by day, until the festival of Shabuot. These were later known as the *Omer* days, the period intervening between the barley and the wheat harvests.

In the Christian Church, the fourteenth day of Nisan had been observed as the day of the crucifixion and kept as a day of fasting and penitence, and the following Sunday as a holiday commemorative of the resurrection. The former, now known as "Good Friday," was originally called *Pascha* or "Passover" and identified with the offering of the paschal lamb in the Temple. This custom prevailed among the early Christians, who were mostly Jews, for a long time, until customs began to vary in different churches as to the observance of the exact day. Stress was laid on making Friday a day for the commemoration of the crucifixion, whether it coincided with the fourteenth of Nisan or not. At the Council of Nicaea (325) it was decided that the Christian Passover should be observed on the Sunday following the full moon of the vernal equinox. As late as the seventh century, the Venerable Bede spoke of the month of April as the *Mensis Paschalis* when "the old festival was observed with the gladness of a new solemnity." The Anglo-Saxon Christians, however, still further severed the relation of the Christian holiday from the Jewish idea of Passover by applying to it the name of an ancient Teuton goddess of Spring, Eostre or Ostra, whence comes the name

Easter or the German *Ostern*. The Church of Rome went still further by decreeing that at no time must the Easter festival coincide with the Jewish Passover, for the reason, as given by Constantine, that "it seemed very unsuitable that we should follow this custom of the Jews, who, constantly erring in the utmost degree, celebrate the Feast of Passover a second time in the same year."

For a long time it was debated whether Easter should become a fixed Sunday after the vernal equinox (March 21) or should remain movable, depending on the lunar (Jewish) calendar. Reverence for tradition led the Church authorities to maintain the old form of calculating Easter by the lunar calendar, although with considerable modifications. While care has been exercised that Easter should not come on the same day as Passover, they did coincide in 1805, 1825 and in 1903 on April 12, in 1923 on April 1, in 1927 on April 17; and will do likewise on April 19th in 1981. The Jews throughout the Middle Ages were not very happy over the proximity of Easter to Passover, as it afforded their enemies opportunities for persecutions and extortions. On Good Friday as well as on Easter Sunday, Jews preferred to shut themselves in their homes, so as not to irritate the festive mobs filled with hate toward them by the sermons that they heard in their churches on these days. During the Middle Ages there was a Church prohibition against Jews showing themselves outside their own streets from Good Friday to the Monday after Easter.

2

"THE GREAT SABBATH"

The Sabbath immediately preceding Passover is known in the Jewish calendar as the "Great Sabbath" (*Shabbat ha-Gadol*). According to tradition, at the time of the exodus from Egypt, the fifteenth day of Nisan occurred on a

Thursday, so that the preceding Sabbath was the tenth of Nisan. It was on that day that the Israelites were told to set aside a lamb for each household (Exodus 12.3). The Israelites were afraid to do the bidding of Moses, lest the Egyptians avenge themselves on them when they saw that they set aside for a sacrifice an animal which was sacred to them (ib. 8.22), but they were reassured by Moses that nothing would happen to them. They then proceeded to carry out the order and each one provided himself with the lamb. The cries of the lambs coming from the Israelitish households attracted the attention of many Egyptians who were ready to attack the Israelites because of what they considered a sacrilege. They were, however, stricken with the dire vengeance prepared for them. Because of this miracle the Sabbath was named the Great Sabbath.

This reason for the name is quoted in the name of Rashi by several of his disciples and is the reason also given in the *Shulhan Aruch*. A more prosaic reason is offered by a codifier of the thirteenth century, Rabbi Zedekiah b. Abraham, in his work *Shibbole ha-Leket*. On the Sabbath before Passover, it has been the custom of the rabbis to deliver lengthy discourses before their congregations, originally for the purpose of explaining to them the many laws and minute regulations connected with the observance of the festival, but later to display their wide knowledge and deep acumen in the interpretation of some topic connected with the laws of Passover. This discourse was usually delivered in the afternoon, after the people had spent considerable time in the synagogue at the long morning services and later in the recitation of a portion of the *Haggadah*. The rabbi often did not stop his discourse with sunset, but kept his audience until late in the evening, hence the Sabbath was named the "Great" because it extended for many more hours than the usual Sabbaths did.

Other authorities advanced different reasons for the name given to this Sabbath. Some connect the name with the *Haftarah* read on the Sabbath from the book of Malachi, which concludes with the passage: "Behold I shall send to you Elijah the prophet prior to the coming of the 'great' and fearful day." Others again say that the name was given to this Sabbath because it was then that the first definite command was given to the whole community of Israel, in the *Mizvah* of the preparation of the paschal lamb. The fact that various reasons are advanced for the designation attached to this Sabbath shows that the original reason is no longer known. The affection of the Jews of all times for the Passover festival and the joy with which it was anticipated for weeks prior to its advent may account for the name "great." This name is not found earlier than the twelfth century, although it is spoken of by the authorities of the time as a name well known and generally applied.

The synagogue service in the morning of this Sabbath is considerably extended by the addition of many *piyyutim* which include also laws and regulations pertaining to the Passover. In the afternoon it is customary to read the earlier sections of the *Haggadah*, so that one may become familiar again with the text, preparatory to the *Seder* ceremony on the evenings of the first two days of the holiday. The sermon delivered by the rabbi in the late afternoon was an event that was looked forward to by the more scholarly men of the community. The medieval rabbi rarely preached. His work was confined mainly to the rendering of decisions in cases of law and in lecturing to his disciples. It was only on the Sabbath of Repentance, coming between Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur, and on the Great Sabbath that the congregation as a whole was privileged to listen to a discourse by the rabbi. While on the Sabbath of Repentance the discourse

was mainly homiletic, designed to awaken in the people a sense of their sins and to arouse their conscience to make restitution and repent, on *Shabbat ha-Gadol* the nature of the discourse was rather *Halachic*, dealing with the more intricate legal enactments in connection with the removal of leaven and the preparation of the home for Passover. The subject would be announced several days ahead and even the text and the sources would be detailed on a sheet of paper, placed prominently on the bulletin board of the synagogue. The students would spend days and nights in looking over the sources and the many commentaries on them, and on Saturday night would assemble in the house of the rabbi, literally pelting him with questions regarding his discourse, which he took good naturedly. In fact, the student who could present the strongest argument to subvert the structure raised by the rabbi in his lecture would gain the affection and esteem of the rabbi as well as of his colleagues. The custom was followed also in England until very recently, and even the present Chief Rabbi maintained it for a short while after he assumed his office.

3

THE FAST OF THE FIRST-BORN

A peculiar ceremony is observed on the morning of the eve of Passover in most of the orthodox synagogues soon after the services. Aged people and young children, all the first-born in their respective families, gather around one person who is celebrating the completion of a treatise of the Talmud and listen to his interpretation of the last section of that treatise. After this, they all partake of refreshments served to them at well-spread tables and all appear happy and satisfied. The entire ceremony is a legal fiction

whereby these first-born men and children obviate the necessity of fasting on this day, in commemoration of the miracle that was performed in Egypt when all the Egyptian first-born died in the plague and the first-born of the Israelites were saved.

The Fast of the First-Born on the eve of Passover is one of the minor fasts in the Jewish calendar, not mentioned directly in the Talmud or in the early codes of law. An indirect reference to it is found in an obscure passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, where it is mentioned that Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi, the compiler of the Mishnah, used to fast on the eve of Passover. The question is asked whether he fasted because he was a first-born, and the answer is given that he fasted because he wanted to come to the evening meal with a good appetite. In a later treatise this custom is mentioned more directly, but only as a custom followed by some. However, in the *Shulhan Aruch* the law is laid down definitely that all male first-born should fast on this day and if the first-born is too young to fast his father should abstain from food and drink in his stead. Some were of the opinion that if the father is also a first-born, the mother should fast in behalf of her first-born son, who is himself unable to fast. Women were absolved from this obligation, although some authorities would impose the duty also upon them. If, however, the first-born is celebrating some joyous event on this day or is invited by a friend to join in the celebration of such an event, he need not fast. This was regarded a *Simhah shel Mizvah* (a religious celebration) which frees all the participants from the duty of fasting. Since the completion of the study of a treatise of the Talmud was considered such a celebration, one of the first-born would arrange to have such an event coincide with the eve of Passover and then invite many others of his colleagues to the festival, whereby they would become exempt from the duty of fasting. Thus this legal fiction arose and is still carried out in many

a Jewish community. Often the celebrant is the rabbi or another member of the congregation who extends the invitation to the first-born to partake of his joy on completing such a study. The refreshments accompanying the celebration are contributed either by the congregation or by the first-born themselves.

The custom has its source in the religious sentiment that the occasion naturally arouses. While the event in itself is a joyous one for the first-born, reminding them of the time when they were saved from a great danger, it is likely to bring up reflections of personal unworthiness in case such danger should again face them. A fast may be an expression of gratitude and need not always be an indication of sadness and sorrow. Dr. M. Friedlander in his *The Jewish Religion*, compares this fast with that of the Fast of Esther, coming on the thirteenth day of Adar, the day set aside by Haman for the destruction of the Israelites, while the day of deliverance (Purim) is observed on the following day as a festival. "So here, the 14th of Nisan was for the first-born a day of danger, the following night the season of deliverance. . . . The day suggests thoughts like the following: Our forefathers were saved from danger; should we deserve to be saved if danger threatened us? Such reflections may have been the origin of the fast of the first-born on the eve of Passover."

Talmudic legend elaborated greatly on the last plague, the smiting of the first-born. The blood of the paschal lamb was to be put on the two side-posts and on the lintels of the doors of the houses of the Israelites to guide the angel of death in his work of destruction. Seeing the blood on the door-posts he would skip over (Passover) these houses, confining himself only to the houses of the Egyptians. Some of the Egyptians suspected that this would be the case and therefore sent their first-born children to the houses of

friendly Israelites, hoping thereby to save them from the doom awaiting them. The plague extended not only to the first-born of the Egyptians but also to the first-born of other nationalities who may have been in Egypt at the time, as well as to the Egyptian first-born in other lands. This was to proclaim the sovereignty of the God of Israel over all peoples and all lands. The blood was to be sprinkled on the doorposts with a bundle of hyssop, which was regarded as the lowliest of plants. This was interpreted symbolically to refer to Israel, the lowliest among the nations of the earth. When Israel is bound together in one single bundle it may serve as the means of warding off the greatest dangers that may be in front of them. Thus rabbinic fancy loved to linger on all the details connected with the story of the most beloved of festivals, the festival of liberation.

4

GOD HARDENED THE HEART OF PHARAOH

In the narrative of the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, contained in the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus, the expression "hardening of the heart of Pharaoh," with reference to his refusal to let the children of Israel go, is found in one form or another nineteen times. In nine cases it is said that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh and in ten the hardening of his heart is ascribed to Pharaoh himself. The phrase has given much trouble to Bible students from the earliest times to the present. If Pharaoh's defiance of the demand made of him by Moses and Aaron in the name of the God of the Hebrews was determined by the divine will, he should not be held responsible for his action. On the other hand, why should Providence exert an influence for evil on the conscience of any individual?

The story, indeed, explains the latter difficulty by saying that this process was necessary in order to impress the Israelites as well as the Egyptians with the belief in the greatness and power of God. "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" is the reason given for the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, although it appears a rather arbitrary way of dealing with a recalcitrant person, not in harmony with our understanding of God's qualities of justice and of mercy.

It is quite natural and should have been expected by Moses that the ruler of Egypt would not willingly part with the Israelitish slaves who brought so much profit to the royal treasury and produced the necessary labors needed in the imposing building plans of the monarch. Tyrants, old or new, do not readily relinquish their prey unless offered some attractive inducements or coerced by superior powers. Appeals on the basis of humanity and justice will not sway them to make concessions to their victims unless these appeals are supported by an outlook for profit or self-aggrandizement. The world has had enough examples of the psychology of the tyrant in recent years to be able to judge the ancient Pharaoh much more leniently. The initial request of Moses was for an outing of three days' duration for the Israelites to go to the wilderness and celebrate a festival in honor of their God. This was refused, and the Egyptian officers were ordered to exact still heavier labors from the unfortunate Israelites. Pharaoh had to be intimidated by placing superior forces over and against his real or imagined power so that he might be induced to comply with Moses' pleas. As each plague occurred, Pharaoh was made to recognize in it the hand of a supernatural power because of its unusual intensity and because of the sequence following upon the warnings issued to him by Moses. However, as soon as the plague subsided, he discounted its supernatural element and thought that

Nature had produced it. He then maintained his original position and refused the demand of Moses, or, in biblical language, he hardened his heart and would not let the children of Israel go. This is the view taken by the author of the narrative who certainly saw in all this the hand of God and the final purpose of effecting the redemption of God's people. In his view, God's direct power was evidenced not only in the series of plagues brought upon the Egyptians, but also in the very stubbornness maintained by Pharaoh after the removal of each plague. The theological concept of the freedom of the human will presented no great difficulty to him. God's knowledge does not determine human action, although the course of action of any person is known beforehand by the Omniscient. In saying that God hardened Pharaoh's heart he meant that God knew that Pharaoh would act as he did and arranged the punishment in accordance with what He knew the course of action would be. This fine distinction made by later Jewish thinkers and theologians, while quite plausible, probably never occurred to the writer, whether Moses or some one else under his direction, and he assumed that Pharaoh's attitude was the work of Providence even as everything else in the world is ascribed to Him. One suggestion has it that the word should be rendered not that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but that He permitted it to remain hardened, not affording him the opportunity of repentance.

Pharaoh's hardening of heart was not a divine act, and could be justified neither on the grounds of justice nor of mercy, the main attributes ascribed to God. Pharaoh's tyranny and despotic attitude toward those dependent on him were punished by the successive series of plagues which the sacred chronicler naturally attributed to God, and thus the results of his wickedness were looked upon as a glorification of God's name. The heart, to the ancients the seat of

intelligence and understanding, when hardened, does not permit humane consideration to enter into it and the longer it remains in that condition the more difficult it is for kindness, goodwill and understanding to penetrate it.

5

THE ROUTE OUT OF EGYPT

Exodus 13.17 says, "And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near, for God said: 'Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.' But God led the people about by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea." This brief statement has provided a large field of speculation by the rabbis. It was estimated that the road from Egypt to Palestine, by direct route, should have taken eleven days. The forty years of wandering about in the Arabian desert were providentially set aside for the preparation of the people for the type of life God wanted the Israelites to lead. Had they settled in Canaan immediately upon leaving Egypt, they might have become engrossed in the cultivation of the soil and would have had no time to devote themselves to an understanding of the destiny set for them. It was the new generation, reared in the hardships of the wilderness under the immediate supervision of Moses, that was deemed worthy to lay the foundations of the spiritual type of national existence which was planned for them.

The rabbis were not satisfied with this simple reason and endeavored to find many other reasons to explain the circuitous route that Israel took. Abraham had made a treaty with the Philistines to live in peace with them for a certain

period and that period would not elapse until forty years later. It seems that in those days treaties were not regarded as mere scraps of paper to be destroyed at will. Another opinion has it that when the Philistines heard of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, they expected that they would soon be attacked by them. They then burnt their crops, destroyed their houses and drained their water supply, very much in the manner of the more modern "scorched earth" policy. God would not take his people to a desolate land and therefore ordered the Israelites to wait in the desert until the Philistines had rebuilt the ruins and again planted their fields and orchards.

A more fanciful explanation for the devious route which the Israelites were ordered to take is given in many sources of the rabbinic *Agada*. This seems to be based on a reminiscence of some historical event connected with the wars between Canaan and Egypt which are referred to in the Tel-el-Amarna letters. According to this legend, many years before the Exodus, a large number of the Ephraimites led by a certain Ganon or Yanon, a descendant of Joseph, repaired to Palestine, fully armed with weapons of gold and silver, with the intention of wresting the land promised to their ancestors from the hands of the Canaanites. They reached the environs of the city of Gath and asked the shepherds who were feeding their flocks there to give them food. When this was refused, the Ephraimites attacked the shepherds and at their outcry the people of Gath came out and they were joined by other Philistine tribes until their number reached forty thousand. The Ephraimites were completely routed, only ten of them surviving to return to Egypt and to tell the tale of their defeat. The bodies of the slain men remained unburied and, in order to save the Israelites departing from Egypt the sight of the disgraced bodies of their brethern, they were ordered to take a different route when they left Egypt.

There is some similarity, in intent at least, between this legendary narrative and the incident in Numbers 14.40–45 and in Deuteronomy 1.41–44. After the exhibition of lack of faith in Moses aroused by the spies, the people became repentant and wished to manifest their faith by undertaking an expedition against the Canaanites in spite of Moses' warning. They met with defeat at a place which was called Hormah. The story of the Ephraimites' abortive attempt has many echoes in later Jewish folklore and it is suggested that the theory that a Messiah son of Ephraim will rise before the arrival of the Messiah son of David, is based on, or related to this ancient legend regarding the bold attempt made by the Ephraimites in Egypt.

6

THE PASCHAL OFFERING

The roasted shankbone displayed on the *Seder* table serves as a symbol of the paschal sacrifice which formed a prominent feature in the observance of the festival in Temple times. According to the prescription for the Pass-over ritual, found in the book of Exodus, every Israelite was to set aside a lamb on the tenth of Nisan, which should be kept until the fourteenth and then killed. The blood should be sprinkled on the doorposts of the houses of the Hebrews, and the people should be ready for the journey, "with loins girded, shoes on their feet and staves in their hands," while partaking of the roasted lambs with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, "in haste." Further details are given in the same chapter, including the injunction that no alien may participate in this sacrificial meal and that slaves may partake of it only after they had been circumcised. This meal was in anticipation of the redemption,

when in consequence of the plague of the first-born the Egyptians urged the Israelites to depart as quickly as possible, and thereby stay the hand of the angel of death.

This so-called "Egyptian Passover" was ordained to be observed for all time, although it is doubtful whether it was kept during the period of the first Temple. The description of its observance during the reign of Hezekiah and again after the reformation of King Josiah, indicating that it was something new and extraordinary, implies that the ceremony fell into disuse during the earlier period of the kings. After the return from Babylon, under Ezra, an elaborate ceremony was performed under the direction of the priests who were ritually purified. During the latter part of the Second Commonwealth we have ample testimony, both in Jewish and Roman sources, to the annual observance of this rite. The impression of the multitudes that came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover must have been tremendous. A Roman visitor relates that the mountains overlooking Jerusalem were practically covered with the sheep brought for sacrifice, "that no grass or herb was visible, the mountains having been all covered with the white wool of the lambs."

On the eve of the holiday, after the regular afternoon sacrifice (*Tamid shel ben ha-Arbayim*) was offered, the throngs of people with their lambs would assemble in the Temple court. Priests and Levites would be stationed there to maintain order. The people were divided into three groups. As the first group was admitted, the priests were in readiness to proceed with the ceremony. The lamb was killed, its blood caught by a priest in a silver or gold basin, which was immediately passed on to the next priest and then from hand to hand until it reached the altar, where it was sprinkled. As the full basin was passed on, an empty one was passed to the priest at the place where the animal was

killed, so that there was no delay in the process. The same Roman officer says: "There was neither confusion nor delay in this procedure; the priests were so efficient in performing this part of their service that the basins appeared to be passing with the rapidity of an arrow thrust by a mighty warrior." While this was going on, the Levites as well as the Israelites would chant the *Hallel*. The slaughtered animal was then delivered to the owner, who would have it skinned right there, where special hooks were provided on which the animals were suspended. If there were not enough hooks, staves were in readiness, on which the animal was suspended over the shoulders of two persons. Then the lamb was carried home to be roasted and eaten, while the story of the redemption from Egypt was elaborately told by the elders, and psalms and hymns were chanted by all the assembled guests. The same process was repeated in the case of all the three groups assembled in the Temple courts.

With the abolition of the sacrificial cult after the destruction of the Temple, the paschal sacrifice, too, was abolished.

7

PASCHAL LAMBS A MEANS OF CENSUS TAKING

The rabbis relate that at one time King Agrippa desired to take a census of the Jews and he ordered the high priest to take one kidney of each lamb that was brought to the Temple on the eve of Passover. When the kidneys were counted it was found that 1,200,000 lambs had been offered. Since there were at least ten individuals in each group of celebrants there were at least twelve million people in Jerusalem that year, exclusive of such as could not participate in the celebration because of ritual impurity or other causes!

Another version of the same incident is found in Josephus who does not mention Agrippa but attributes this count to Cestius Gallus, Governor of Syria, who wanted to demonstrate to Nero the power of the city and the immensity of the Jewish population. He ordered the high priest to take a census of the people at the feast of Passover, "when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour until the eleventh, but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice (for it is not lawful for them to feast singly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company, found the number of sacrifices was 256,500; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together amounts to 2,700,200 persons that were pure and holy; for as to those that have the leprosy, it is not lawful for them to be partakers of this sacrifice; nor indeed for any foreigners either who come hither to worship." In another place in the same book, Josephus gives the number of celebrants in Jerusalem in that year as "not fewer in number than 3,000,000."

Both these records probably contain some exaggeration in the number, although the fact of the census at that time, in the year 66 or 65 of the present era, rests on a solid historic foundation. Those were the most turbulent days for the little province of Judea, groaning under the yoke of the Roman procurators, with their greed, cruelty and disregard of everything that was sacred to the Jews. The profligate and unscrupulous Nero paid little attention to the miseries inflicted upon the Jews by the procurators and their underlings and regarded a possible uprising in that province as most remote. The Jews, although divided into contesting parties and torn by dissensions within their camp, could not bear the tyranny of their oppressors any longer and even the more calm among them could not any longer restrain the outburst of popular indignation. This was directed mainly against the rapacious Procurator, Florus,

whose tyranny and cruelty were constantly irritating and exasperating the Judeans. Agrippa II, the grandson of Herod, although endowed with the title of King by Claudius, held only a small principality and had no control over the capital, except the Temple and priesthood. He, together with his beautiful sister, Berenice, knowing the Roman court well and aware of the inevitable results of a rebellion against it by the unorganized and weak Judeans, tried their best to stem the tide of revolution, but their endeavors were fruitless both because the people had no confidence in them and because of the excesses and outrages committed by the Roman soldiery throughout the land.

When the danger became imminent and Nero still continued to indulge in his puerile pastimes and licentious orgies, Cestius Gallus, the Governor of Syria, who exercised control also over Judea, perceived the danger and warned Nero of the coming insurrection, but no attention was paid to his warnings either by the Emperor or the Senate. The Empress Poppaea, who had shown consideration for the Jews on previous occasions and who was even suspected of having adopted Judaism, was dead, so that there was no champion in Rome who would advocate the Jewish cause. Cestius, however, was determined to open the eyes of the Emperor to the danger lurking in the preparations which he saw in progress in Judea and devised a plan which would convince the Emperor and the Senate of the tremendous extent of the Judean population and the folly of regarding the possible insurrection lightly. He then consulted with Agrippa and with the High Priest Matthias and they agreed to stimulate a large attendance at Jerusalem of Jews from all provinces in connection with the festival of Passover. Through circulars and messengers sent throughout Judea, crowds assembled in Jerusalem, coming from every town and hamlet in Judea, from Syria, Egypt and other countries round and about Judea, on the Passover

of 66. The crowds were so dense that some of the pilgrims were crushed to death, and for this reason that Passover is designated in the Talmud as *Pesach Meuchin*, the Passover when people were crushed. It was then that the census was taken in the manner described in the Talmud and by Josephus.

Both Cestius and Florus were present in the capital on that memorable Passover and petitions were presented to both of them by the leaders of the Jews. Florus accepted these delegations with disdain and sneering, but Cestius promised to present their case to Rome and to intercede in their behalf with the procurator. When his report was submitted to Nero, the latter is reported to have said: "Should Nero, whose triumphs surpassed those of Pompey, Caesar and Augustus, fear Judea?" It is not unlikely that the report of Cestius was not even submitted to the Emperor. The method of taking a census of the Jews by means of counting their paschal lambs apparently established an approximate estimate of the numbers and the strength of the people crushed under the heavy heels of the unprincipled and brutal Roman leaders. Revolution broke out in all its fury soon after that. Nero then realized that the bravery and perseverance of a crushed people cannot be disregarded, although he himself did not see the final destruction of the state whose powers he underrated and whose patriotism and devotion kept up a stubborn resistance for nearly four years against the greatest power of that time.

8

THE PREPARATION OF THE MAZZOT

It is just a little more than half a century since machinery for the baking of mazzot was invented in England. Some of the rabbis of the time opposed the new invention for

technical and legal reasons, but after modifications had been introduced to remove the objections, machine-baked mazzot were used in all Jewish communities throughout the world. There are still some ultra-pious Jews who prefer the old method of preparing the mazzot and many use home-baked mazzot only, at least on the first two nights of the festival. With the perfection of the machinery and by the introduction of a number of contrivances, aiming at the increase in the speed of production, there can be but little doubt that the machine-made mazzot are perhaps even more kosher from the standpoint of the requirements of the law than the old-fashioned, hand-made mazzot.

The custom prevalent before the invention of machinery was for every individual householder to have his mazzot baked for him in the bakery. The bakery was provided with special help, mostly women, who attended to the preparation of the dough, rolling it into flat cakes, perforating the cakes, and then placing them in the oven. The individual rented the entire establishment for the time being, regarding it a special privilege to supervise the operation himself. Baking usually started long before dawn and the members of the household of the individual who had his mazzot baked then, including also the young boys and girls, would rise early to have a share in the performance. One would go around with a wet towel among the women engaged in rolling out the cakes, enabling them to wipe their hands frequently so that no particle of dough might remain on their hands while engaged in the work. The rollers were made of smooth wood or of glass, so that they could be easily wiped. Another member of the family would watch over the distribution of the pieces of dough so that there should not remain any particle of dough on the table near him which might again be taken up in a larger piece. The youngsters, though initiated to regard

the process with seriousness and proud of any commission entrusted to them, managed to have a good time and to derive much pleasure from the activity, while the adolescent boys were not averse to snatching a moment from the solemn business of supervision to indulge in some innocent flirtation with the pretty girls who were employed as helpers in the establishment.

The essential element in the preparation of the mazzot is speed, so that the dough is given no chance to ferment. The flour is mixed with cold water, preferably drawn from the well the night before, and there must elapse no time between the preparation of the dough and the rolling of its small parts into cakes. As soon as the cakes were rolled out they were taken over to the special table where a few youths were engaged in passing over each cake a small implement in the form of a wheel which was provided with sharp teeth, whereby perforations were made, in order to prevent the cake from rising. Time was when these perforations were made into artistic designs, but this was disapproved of by some rabbis. The table for this purpose was usually directly in front of the oven, so that the baker would lift the mazzot right from the table and deposit them in the hot oven. As soon as he noticed some of them baked, he would take them out at once and deposit them in large baskets standing at his side. The crispness and taste of the mazzot depended on the skill with which the dough was rolled out and the evenness of the temperature of the oven. For the fastidious or sick persons, a special kind of mazzot was baked, known as "rich mazzot." These were made by mixing some fruit juice or eggs with the dough before it was kneaded. This process was regarded as perfectly proper, although not allowed for the making of the mazzot used on the first two Seder nights.

There was no problem of unemployment in Jewish communities during the period of mazzot-baking. There were jobs for everybody, the aged and the child, the man and the woman, the skilled and the unskilled. While the wages paid by the bakers were very low, the tips received from the wealthier members of the community when their mazzot were baked, made the occupation comparatively lucrative and many a Jewish family looked forward to that period when they might earn the wherewithal for the proper observance of the festival. The work was very hard and exacting, requiring the laborers to be at their jobs for eighteen hours a day or more, for a period of five or six weeks, but the prospect of having a pleasant holiday and a week of complete rest made the drudgery bearable. The invention of machinery for baking mazzot did away with all this and made of mazzot-baking an industry, financially productive, and removed the many inconveniences that had been connected with the process, although removing with the same sweep much of the poetry and romance that were connected with the simple mode of each person preparing his own mazzot. The old practice is still preserved in the preparation of the special *Mazzah Shemurah*, on the afternoon of the eve of Passover, in which the pious Jews endeavor to preserve most of the ancient customs and methods. This mazzah is made out of flour that has been set aside for that purpose even before the grain was taken off the field, guarded scrupulously throughout the period of harvesting, grinding and making of the dough. For the preparation of these special mazzot, only men most scrupulous in their observance of the law are engaged. Many people are careful to have *Mazzah Shemurah* at least for the Seder nights.

THE SEDER SERVICE

The narrative in the book of Exodus in connection with the story of the deliverance from Egypt, provides for a sacrificial meal which is to be partaken of by the members of the family, the main elements of which were the paschal lamb, mazzot and bitter herbs. The prescription of this ceremony concludes with the words: "And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you: What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say: It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, for that He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses" (Exodus 12.26-27).

Although it is stipulated that the ceremony is to become a perpetual law, it is doubtful whether it was followed generally during the period of the First Temple. In later times, when the observance of the Passover had become firmly established, the paschal offering had to be brought to the Temple, although it was to be consumed in the family circle according to the Scriptural prescription. The ceremony is mentioned in the New Testament and there it is indicated that hymns were sung, probably the *Hallel*, during the feast. In the course of the development of the liturgy, soon after the fall of the Second Temple, a special service for the meal was provided, many portions of which may have been in use at a much earlier period.

The emphasis laid in the Bible on the duty of parents to relate the Passover story to their children, the injunction occurring no less than four times, eventually produced the *Seder Haggadah* (Service Book) which was to be recited during the feast. The very term *Haggadah* is taken from the verb *v'higadta* ("and thou shall tell") used in the command

that one is to tell to his son of the wonders and miracles that occurred in connection with the Exodus. In the literal fulfilment of this idea all kinds of devices have been adopted in order to stimulate the children to ask the question as to why this night differs from all other nights. The arrangement of the table, the various articles of food placed there, different from those ordinarily used, the manner of sitting at the table, all of these produced wonder in the minds of the children and stirred them on to ask questions.

These questions gradually became stereotyped and were reduced to four. They are intended to bring out the chief features of the festival celebration. The answer to the questions was contained in the narrative beginning either with the actual subjection of the Israelites in Egypt, with the passage "Slaves were we," or with the earlier patriarchal period, beginning with the passage "Our ancestors were idolators," leading up to the settlement in Egypt. In the present form of the *Haggadah*, both these versions have been combined. The story, however, is not told simply, but is interwoven with quotations from the Bible and with the homiletic interpretations given to these passages in the Talmud and Midrashim. It concludes with the enumeration of the ten plagues.

The meal itself differs in no way from the usual festive meal. In order that the taste of the paschal sacrifice should remain with the celebrants, no dessert was served after the meal. This law still survives in the custom of eating a piece of mazzah at the end of the meal, which is known as *Afikomen* (the dessert). The *Hallel* is concluded immediately after the meal, followed by Psalm 136, known as the "Great Hallel," and by *Nishmat*. In later times, several hymns were added to the end of the service, which were especially adapted to group singing and responsive chants. The last two pieces, "Who Knows One?" and "One Only Kid,"

which have become most popular, are probably of late origin, following some old German nursery rhymes, to which, however, historical and even philosophical significance has been attached by various commentators. Whatever later preachers and commentators found in these simple chants, they have always provided ample entertainment to the children of the household and their insertion is entirely in harmony with the nature of the service, which was to provide instruction and amusement to the children, whereby their sense of loyalty and religious devotion should be heightened and strengthened.

10

THE FOUR QUESTIONS OF THE HAGGADAH

The number "four" plays an important part in the *Seder* service. We have the four cups of wine that one, even the poorest, is expected to drink during the evening; the four types of sons with their questions, and also the four questions with which the service begins. These questions already found in the Mishnah in a slightly different form, must have been in vogue during the time of the Second Temple, and the rest of the *Haggadah* is practically a reply to them. Taking the biblical phrase, "When thy son asketh thee," literally, it was provided that the services should start with a question on the part of the child in the family. If no child is present at the ceremony, the questions are to be asked by an adult, and when one has no company at the table and is obliged to read the service alone, the questions should still form the initial part of the service.

In Temple times, when the paschal lamb was offered and roasted on the Temple precincts, and then taken home to be consumed by the celebrants, the order of the questions

was as follows: (1) Why may we eat only mazzah this night while on other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread? (2) Why may we eat only bitter herbs this night and not other kinds of herbs? (3) Why may we eat only roast meat on this night and not meat prepared in any other way? (4) Why do we dip the herbs twice on this night, while on other nights we do so only once? After the abolition of the sacrificial system, the third question was naturally omitted, the fourth taking its place, and another question added: Why on all other nights may we take our meals either sitting or leaning, whereas on this night we all lean? The word *mesubbin*, used here for reclining, really means banqueting, as the reclining position was the regular position taken by freemen at banquets. All the questions are related to the meal, the element most prominent in the service. The evening meal was the main repast of the day in ancient times, as it is with many in modern days, and it was this meal which was made the occasion for the celebration that accompanied it.

Many of the details connected with the *Seder* arrangements were intended primarily to arouse the curiosity of the children and to stimulate their interest. They were made to sleep in the afternoon so that they could stay up later in the evening. All preparations were to be made in the afternoon, so that the *Seder* might be begun immediately at nightfall, and the attractive songs and chants were kept to the end, so as to keep the children awake in anticipation of the riddles and jingles which they knew would come later. In order that the questions should be more spontaneous, they were placed after the *Kiddush* — a rite observed on all Sabbaths and holidays — when the second cup was filled. The child, who would expect the meal to start immediately after the *Kiddush*, on seeing another cup filled would be stimulated to ask the reason for the deviation from the

regular practice. The actual questions set down in the *Haggadah* cannot be spontaneous, as they relate to practices that come only later in the meal. In many lands, it was customary to have the questions asked in the language of the land rather than in the Hebrew.

In the present form, the first two questions deal with customs prescribed in the Bible, while the other two deal with customs of much later origin. Similarly the first two questions, dealing with *mazzah* and *maror*, recall the period of Egyptian slavery, while the other two symbolize the idea of liberty. This gave the homilists ample opportunity for interpretation and for the extraction of moral and religious lessons. The reference to the dipping of the salad in the salt water and of the bitter herbs in the *haroset*, contained in the third question, has regard to a custom prevalent in ancient times of beginning the meal with an entree of some tart mixture to stimulate the appetite. This was common and regular, but the second dipping of the bitter herbs in the *haroset* caused the child to notice the difference. It was both the unusual festive character of the meal and the peculiar articles of food served that were the subjects of the child's curiosity and wonderment. The chief purpose of the entire ceremony was to arrest the attention of the child and to arouse its interest, and it was with this end in view that both the questions and the answers were composed, the answer being adjusted to the intelligence of the child and to its interest.

11

THE "FOUR SONS" OF THE HAGGADAH

While many of the Jewish ceremonies were intended to be reminders of the great fact of the liberation from Egyptian bondage, the Passover festival was the special institu-

tion designed to bring home the memory of this historic event which marked the origin of Jewish national life so that it should always remain in the consciousness of the Jewish people. With keen pedagogic insight, our sages and lawgivers arranged the ceremonies of the festival in such a manner that they should arouse the curiosity of the children and make them realize that here a great event is being commemorated, greater than any with which they may be acquainted. Stimulated to inquire after the reason for the changes in the regular routine of the home, they would propound certain questions, to which the *Haggadah* was to furnish the answer.

In the description of the *Seder* service in the Bible, this is indicated in four distinct places (Deuteronomy 6.20; Exodus 12.26 and 13.14 and 8). In all these passages, the injunction is placed upon the father to "relate" (*Hagged*, in the last-named passage whence the name *Haggadah* is probably derived) to his son the reason for the observance. The rabbis, who were meticulously careful in their study of the Scriptures, endeavored to explain why the injunction should be repeated four times, and came to the conclusion that the four expressions must apply to four different types of inquirers. Thus was developed the idea of the four sons: the wise son, asking respectfully and really desiring to know the reason for the ceremonies as well as their details, so that he may follow the traditions closely and intelligently; the wicked son, who throws out a sneering and contemptuous remark as to why all that trouble and all these minutiae of the observances; the simple son, who is unable to distinguish details, but realizes that there is something strange happening and wants to know what all this is about; and the son who is so young that his curiosity is not at all aroused to lead him to ask any question.

The artists who produced illustrations for the *Haggadah*

in olden times did not adhere to the original idea, but presented the four sons as grown men. The wise son is pictured as a sage, dressed in the garments worn by scholars; the wicked son is dressed in the armor of a warrior, with helmet and sword; the simple one as a shepherd with a long stick in his hand; and the one who is unable to present a question as a small man with his hands up in the air. It is quite characteristic to picture the wicked person as a soldier, a person most hateful to the medieval Jew. Some of the more modern artists have tried to go back to the original intention of the tradition about the four types of children and presented the four sons as young lads, the wicked son assuming the form of a prizefighter and a bully.

The questions of the wise and wicked sons appear very much alike, and commentators have been at great pains to explain the harsh rebuke administered to the wicked. The rabbis apparently took into consideration not the query itself, but the manner in which it was presented. The wise son says: "What mean those testimonies, statutes and judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you?" implying a sincere desire to learn the details of the ceremonies as well as the reasons for them, and the answer is an exposition of all the laws of the paschal meal, including the law pertaining to the conclusion of the ceremony that no dessert must be partaken of after the paschal offering was consumed. The wicked son asks: "What mean you by this service?" an abrupt and harsh query, denoting derision and ridicule rather than a desire to understand and to follow. Hence the answer is a sharp and rough reproof that one like him would not have been worthy of redemption. The real offence of the wicked son is not in asking the question, but in excluding himself from the generality of the people, which is regarded as a denial of the fundamental ideas underlying Jewish life. "You wish to stand outside,

to take no hand in the struggles and ambitions of your people, to remain aloof from the interest and ideals which they cherish. You may do so. We shall get along without you." Israel demands of its sons loyalty, devotion and intimate participation in all its woes and triumphs, in all its ideals and manner of life, and regards with contempt the deserter, who would exclude himself from the community.

12

THE TEN PLAGUES

A feature of the *Seder* service is the recital of the ten plagues which were inflicted upon the Egyptians before they consented to liberate the Israelites. The custom of making a drop of wine drip off the cup at the mention of each plague is very old and is already mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud. Various reasons have been assigned. There is the mystical reason, connected with the fear that the very mention of evil might affect the person who utters the words and especially leave a mark on a beverage or food that stands open at the time. The ethical reason is more appealing. The memory of the misfortunes that befell the Egyptians causes a feeling of regret and sadness which finds expression in the deprivation experienced by pouring off part of the wine that one was to drink. A similar thought is suggested by the legend that God refused to listen to the songs of praise uttered by the angels on the day when the Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, which is the reason for curtailing the number of Psalms included in the *Hallel* during the last days of Passover. The custom of dipping the small finger in the cup and taking the wine out drop by drop in this manner is discouraged by some authorities on grounds of waste and also for hygienic reasons.

The Egyptian plagues are enumerated in detail in the book of Exodus, and are also referred to in Psalms 78 and 105. In the Psalms not all the plagues are included, nor is the order followed in Exodus preserved there. Modern Bible students have found that many of these plagues are not unusual in Egypt, and therefore maintain that the divine power used here was "the ordinary seasonal phenomena in a miraculously intensified form as the instrument of judgment." The rabbis, however, have elaborated upon the miracles connected with the plagues, and used their imagination to justify them and to point to the moral of God's attribute of retribution. Each one of the plagues corresponded to the deeds of persecution practiced by the Egyptians upon the Israelites, "measure for measure." Some of the plagues also served the purpose of convincing the Egyptians of the futility of their idolatrous beliefs and practices. The Nile was worshiped as a god, and offerings were made to it. The pollution of the sacred river, killing its fishes, the main article of food in ancient Egypt, was a severe blow to the prejudices and beliefs of the Egyptians. In an agricultural country like Egypt, a severe hailstorm which destroyed the crops, followed by a swarm of locusts, which devoured what remained of the vegetation after the hail, must have been regarded as a terrible catastrophe. Interesting is the rabbinic reason as to why the first plague was carried out by Aaron and not by Moses. The latter owed a debt of gratitude to the Nile for maintaining him alive when he was placed on it in his infancy; hence Moses refused to act as the agent of bringing humiliation to it, and delegated Aaron to act in his stead. Similar reasons are given for the execution of the next two plagues by Aaron instead of by Moses, others directly by God (flies or wild beasts, boils and the death of the first-born Egyptians), while one (murrain) was performed jointly by Moses and Aaron. The advent of most of the plagues was preceded by

a warning from Moses to Pharaoh. Only the third, sixth and ninth came without any warning.

In the *Haggadah*, the enumeration of the Ten Plagues is followed by a mnemonic sign, giving the initials of the names of the plagues, in the name of R. Judah. This was probably intended to serve as an aid to the memory to preserve the order and the number of the plagues, which differ in the Exodus narrative and in the Psalms. The fanciful elaboration of the three *Tannaim* which follows this enumeration in the *Haggadah*, whereby the number of the plagues was greatly increased, was not due to a gloating over the misery of the Egyptians or to a feeling of revenge, but rather to stress the justice of God in meting out punishment to the sinner. The more probable reason for these fanciful interpretations was the desire to afford amusement to the children, for whom the *Seder* was chiefly intended. The mathematical puzzle is always a sure means of attracting attention and arousing interest of children, as well as of adults.

13

THE CUP OF ELIJAH

The symbols and ceremonies associated with the Passover *Seder* service are derived principally from the sacrificial meal ordained for the evening. The meal was preceded by the regular *Kiddush*, the prayer of sanctification of the day, said on the occasion of the Sabbath and of all holidays. Another cup of wine was taken immediately before the meal and one after the meal. A fourth cup of wine was drunk at the very end of the ceremony. The rabbis endeavored to find scriptural support for the four cups of wine, basing the custom on the different expressions for the redemption used

in connection with the Exodus (Exodus 6.6-7) or on the various forms of persecution practised by the Egyptians on the Jews. The drinking of the four cups was made obligatory upon every Israelite and the use of red wine was especially recommended since this would be reminiscent of the first plague brought upon the Egyptians.

In the center of the *Seder* table, a cup of larger size is placed, filled with wine which is not touched during the ceremony. This is designated as the Cup of Elijah and is partaken of by some at the end of the services and by others not at all. In Jewish folklore, Elijah the Prophet plays a very important role, and is especially connected with the coming of the Messiah whose advent Elijah is expected to announce. The hope for the future redemption becomes keen on the occasion of the celebration of the first redemption and it seeks expression in the symbols and ceremonies of the festival. "They were redeemed in Nisan and they will again be redeemed in Nisan," is the hope held out by the rabbis, hence the cup is placed on the *Seder* table to express our readiness to welcome the coming of the ubiquitous Tishbite prophet to bring the good tidings of the speedy arrival of the Messiah. Some associate the custom of opening the door after the meal also with the expectation of Elijah's appearance, to whom every Jewish house extends a welcome. Both at the beginning and at the end of the *Haggadah*, the hope is expressed that the next year we shall be relieved of the yoke of the *Galut* and restored to Jerusalem.

The sudden appearance on the stage of Jewish history of the prophet Elijah, his great zeal and intrepid courage in his fight for the restoration of the worship of the God of Israel, his final "translation" to heaven, as recorded in the Bible, made him the most glorified hero in Jewish legend. The rabbis elaborated on the incomplete and mystifying biblical account of the activities of this powerful personality

and used their imagination freely in surrounding his life with a halo of mystery and of wonder not achieved by any other character in the whole range of Jewish history. The connection of Elijah with the final advent of the Messiah is already foreshadowed in the utterances of Malachi, the last of the prophets, by whom he is pictured as bringing peace and harmony in the Jewish family. "Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 3.23). The rabbis make this apply to the future cessation of all controversy, all difficulties becoming adjusted through him. So deeply set was this belief that the phrase used in the Talmud for an indefinite period is usually "until Elijah will come," and all difficult or contradictory passages in the Bible were expected to be explained by him. In the talmudic *Agada*, he is often represented as having appeared in person to certain rabbis and solved for them some legal difficulties. At the ceremony of circumcision, a chair is placed on the right hand of the *Sandek* (godfather), which is supposed to be occupied by Elijah, "the angel of the covenant," the guardian of little children. Because of his complaint that Israel had forsaken the covenant, it was ordained that no circumcision should take place except in his presence. The "Chair of Elijah" and the "Cup of Elijah" are thus symbolic of the reverence for this wonderful character and of the great hope which his memory arouses.

14

OPENING THE DOOR DURING SEDER

After the *Seder* meal is concluded and grace chanted, it is customary to open the door while the assembly recites a few verses from the Book of Psalms and from Jeremiah in

which God is invoked to punish the enemies of Israel. Various reasons for this ceremony have been offered by commentators and it is not unlikely that the custom, which may be quite ancient in origin, assumed added meanings in the course of history. Oriental princely banquets usually began with the opening of the doors of the banquet hall to admit any stranger to the meal. This was an expression of the hospitality that was so distinguishing a mark in the Orient and of which Jewish story and folklore retain so many examples. The Talmud relates that Rab Hunah, a Babylonian teacher of the third century, would open the doors of his house wide, whenever he sat down to a meal, and proclaim: "Whoever is hungry, let him come in and eat," strongly reminiscent of the phrase used at the very beginning of the *Seder* service. Similarly, at the end of the meal, the doors were again opened to permit the passing strangers to proceed on their way.

During the Middle Ages, the opening of the door was impracticable, since this symbol of hospitality might have harbored great dangers for the inhabitants of the house. Disguised messengers of their enemies might take advantage of this opportunity to smuggle in the dead body of a Christian child and then spread the report that Jews had killed it and used its blood for the Passover meal. Such incidents were not uncommon and some bigots or rascals did not hesitate to utilize the opportunity for their sinister purposes. The ancient custom of opening the doors at the end of the meal, however, was retained and utilized for different purposes — it was opened for the purpose of examining the premises to see whether any suspicious objects have been hidden or any suspicious persons were loitering about there. Is there any wonder that the galling need for this circum-spection should call forth the maledictions on the heads of those who plotted evil against them? The selection of the biblical passages that give expression to that feeling of re-

sentment and bitterness is variously given in the different rites. The Sephardim have only the first two passages taken from the Book of Psalms, while the early Ashkenazic rituals, going back to the period of the Crusades, have many additional verses as well as original supplements expressive of the agony and the pain which they suffered at the hands of the roving hordes of the fanatical pilgrims. In the established version, the two passages from the Psalms are supplemented by one more verse taken from the Book of Lamentations. While in the Bible the passages refer to other times and conditions, they were regarded appropriate to express the feelings of anguish under the heels of the oppressor that our ancestors experienced throughout those dark ages.

The old ceremony of opening the door, originally intended as a gesture of hospitality, was later given an added meaning to serve as a welcome to Elijah should he be ready to appear and make his longed-for announcement. In fact, this later significance is the one best known and commonly understood purpose of the ceremony.

The various elements in the *Seder* service thus form a mirror of the accumulated experiences of Israel, reflecting the joys and the sorrows, the fears and the hopes, the noble traits of hospitality and love for the stranger and the deep-set resentment against the maltreatments and dangers to which our ancestors were subjected at various periods in our history. Even in such a simple ceremony as the opening of the door there is a rich and extensive field of speculation manifesting all the horrors and woes, all the hopes and aspirations that were aroused by the reminiscences that the holiday calls forth. The superstitious may have thought of the ceremony in the light of allowing the curses contained in the biblical passages to go out of the house, while the

more cautious may have implied in it an invitation to the Christian authorities to come in and convince themselves that there was nothing mysterious or improper in the *Seder* ritual. All of these are reflections of past experiences and make the festival the outstanding national holiday of the Jewish calendar.

15

THE SONG "ONE ONLY KID"

In furtherance of the purpose of the *Seder* service, to impress the story of the Exodus on the minds of the children, the *Haggadah* introduced a number of songs, one of the best known being the *Had Gadya*, "One Only Kid." It is not found in the Sephardic nor in the Oriental versions of the *Haggadah* and is supposed to have been first introduced into the Ashkenazic rite during the fifteenth century. The Prague edition of the *Haggadah* of 1526 does not contain it, but the edition of 1590, in the same city, has the song with a German translation. The poem is written in Aramaic, mixed with Hebrew words, and sounds like a nursery-rhyme, parallels of which may be found in large numbers in medieval German and French literature, as well as in some out-of-the-way-collections of rhymes, including even a Siamese parallel. It is entirely in keeping with the nature of the *Haggadah* and was undoubtedly included primarily with an eye to arousing the interest of the children. It has been suggested that this and other songs were really chanted at the beginning of the service in order to keep the children awake, and that it was only at a later time that they were placed at the end of the service. Whether or not the Jewish author borrowed the idea from a current rhyme of his day cannot be ascertained, since neither the author nor his time or place is known.

The rabbinical commentators on the *Haggadah* have found the *Had Gadya* a fertile field for their fancy. Many of them see in it an illustration of the divine principle of justice dominating the world, based on the famous saying of Hillel, when he saw the skull of a man floating on the surface of the water: "Because thou didst drown others, they have drowned thee, and at last they that drowned thee shall themselves be drowned." There is design and purpose in the world and punishment is bound to come to persons guilty of crimes. No one can escape the consequences of sin; the cat as well as the angel of death must submit to the inexorable rule of justice administered by God, the Ruler of the universe. He is above the most powerful of His creatures, and in the fulness of time His justice will prevail. Thus, this simple and naive nursery rhyme has been interpreted to teach profound moral lessons and elaborate volumes have been written on the basis of the illustrations which it represents.

Naturally the Jews found in it also an illustration of their fate in the world and their hope for future redemption. The whole drama is looked upon as a parable, illustrative of Israel's history, and the characters in it were made to represent the many foes whom Israel encountered in the course of its extensive and varied experiences. The kid represents Israel whom God the father acquired as His peculiar nation by means of the two pieces of silver, representing the tablets of stone, on which the Ten Words were engraved, or according to others, through His two representatives, Moses and Aaron. The cat is symbolic of Egypt; the dog stands for Assyria; the stick is the emblem of Persia; the fire is Alexander the Great of Macedonia; the water is the Roman Empire; the ox stands for the Moslem world; the butcher represents the Saracens or the Crusaders; and the angel of death is the symbol of the Turks who wrested

Palestine from the hands of both. The finale of the drama will come when God himself will slay the angel of death, drive the Turks out of Palestine and restore it to its rightful owner, Israel. Of course, this last simile will have to get a new interpretation at the hands of modern exegetes, in the light of the events of recent years. Some take the various characters to represent other nations that oppressed Israel in the course of the centuries, and the desire to make the characters fit the various enemies of Israel has been the basis of many speculations and intricate studies on the part of the commentators. The catalogue of Israel's foes is quite extensive and contains many lists of names out of which may be selected such as would fit the nature of the actors in this simple drama of the "One Only Kid."

16

ILLUMINATED HAGGADAHS

From the earliest period of the Middle Ages down to the invention of printing, the manuscript *Haggadahs* were provided with quaint and interesting illustrations, more or less elaborate. Since the narrative of the *Haggadah* carries the story back to the Patriarchs, there was ample opportunity for the ambitious artist to display his ingenuity in illustrating the various incidents in ancient Jewish history. In fact, some of them did not confine themselves to the period under discussion and went back to the creation of the world. Of course, the ten plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the Revelation on Mount Sinai, were the most favored topics for the artist. Besides this class of illustrations, we find also sketches of the various activities in connection with the preparation of the Passover; as the baking of mazzot, the preparation of the *haroset*, and other matters pertaining

to the domestic life of the Jews. Perhaps the best known illustration is that of the "Four Sons." These four questioners appear at first separate, but in later manuscripts they are all combined in one picture. The wise son is represented as a staid and scholarly man, with the right hand stretched out as though propounding a question. The wicked son is invariably pictured as a soldier, to the medieval Jewish mind the incarnation of evil and the foe of mankind. He stands on one leg, his right hand stretched out in derision, while his left hand grasps the sword. The simple son leans with both hands on a staff; while the one who does not know how to ask a question has both his hands in the air and is represented in profile.

Some of the illuminated *Haggadahs* have real artistic merit. The most noted of these is the well-known *Sarajewo Haggadah*, published in 1898 by Muller, von Schlosser and Kaufman. This *Haggadah* was probably written early in the fourteenth century, and has numerous illuminated illustrations as well as decorated initials. The *Haggadah* has been printed more often than any other book excepting the Bible; S. Wiener, who has collected a bibliography of *Haggadahs*, mentions 895 separate editions. Perhaps the most complete collection of the various editions of the *Haggadah* is now found in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The oldest edition is assumed to be the one printed in Soncino in 1486. The first printed illustrated *Haggadah* is probably that of Prague, 1526, which contains border decorations of great artistic merit.

In modern times, this ancient illustrator's art has been revived and several editions of the *Haggadah*, illustrated by modern artists, have appeared in the last few years. Perhaps the most neatly executed and the most daintily printed is that illustrated by Joseph Budko, and published in Vienna in 1921. The one illustrated by Jacob Steinhardt and published in Berlin, 1923, follows modern art, and

some of the pictures are rather gruesome. An entire work devoted to illustrations of the last hymn, *Had Gadya*, has also appeared. The Song of Songs, which is read at the conclusion of the service by devout Jews, has been issued in a superb form, with exquisite illustrations and with both the Hebrew and the English text, the work of a pupil of the famous Bezalel School of Jerusalem. Saul Raskin of New York issued the complete text of the *Haggadah* with an English translation, accompanied by numerous original illustrations. Many of the most recent editions of this service-book have drawings and sketches by modern artists. A most attractive edition of a *Children's Haggadah* with illustrations in colors appeared in London several years ago.

17

THE SONG OF SONGS

The reading of the scroll of the Song of Songs during the Passover festival has been established by a tradition followed through the ages. An ancient authority relates that the scroll was divided into two parts, and was read on the last two nights of the feast. The same custom also obtained in the reading of the Book of Ruth during the two nights of the festival of Shabuot. Later usage, however, prescribed that the Song of Songs be read on the Sabbath of *Hol ha-Moed* of Passover, and when there was no intervening Sabbath, on the seventh day of the festival. This is now the established custom in the synagogue, although many pious Jews also read the entire scroll on the first two nights, after the *Seder* service, to the same chant used in the synagogue.

The connection between the Song of Songs and the Passover holiday rests entirely upon the allegoric interpretation given by the rabbis to this exquisite love song. In fact, the

very admission of this small book into the scriptural canon depended upon the allegoric usage made of it by the *Agadists*. The Passover festival commemorates the redemption of Israel from the yoke of a foreign oppressor, whereupon Israel became the people of God. Israel is the bride and God is the groom, the betrothal having occurred at the time when Israel was redeemed from Egypt to become the beloved people of God, and the nuptials were solemnized at Mount Sinai when Israel accepted the Torah. The entire Song of Songs expresses the longings and deep love and fidelity of Israel to God. Some early exegetes found in this book a portrayal of the entire history of Israel, from the Exodus from Egypt until the expected messianic era. It is with this interpretation in view that Rabbi Akiba, an outstanding *Tanna* of the first century of the present era, proclaimed that "the whole world was not worth the day on which the Song was given to Israel. For all writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies." This attitude toward the poem has prevailed among Jews from very early times and was also entertained by the Christian Church, although some Christian exegetes read into it the relation between Jesus and the Church or the individual believer.

Only few medieval commentators dared interpret the Song of Songs in its literal meaning, seeing in it a picture of conjugal love and fidelity. In more recent years, the literal interpretation is the one most commonly accepted by Bible students. They can find in the book no indication that it was intended to be taken in an allegorical sense, although opinions differ widely as to the exact meaning and original purpose of the work. The most prevalent opinion is that the poem describes the intense love between a shepherd and a country-girl, whose beauty attracted the attention of King Solomon. The king, in one of his travels

in the north, noticed the girl and had her taken into his harem. She would not, however, respond to the king's efforts to obtain her love and remained faithful to her shepherd lover, despite the seductive speeches and compliments showered upon her by Solomon. She was finally released and reunited with her lover.

A more attractive theory is presented by some modern critics, who associate the poem with the historic incident recorded in the first and second chapters of the First Book of Kings. There it is related that when King David grew old, they found for him a very beautiful girl, by the name of Abishag the Shunammite, who became a "companion to the king and ministered to him." After the death of David, Adonijah, a brother of Solomon, asked Bath-Sheba to intercede with the king in his behalf, so that he might make Abishag his wife. This incensed Solomon so much that he swore that Adonijah should pay with his life for this presumption. Abishag, the Shunammite, is taken to be identical with the Shulammite girl referred to in the Song of Songs and the theory is that this beautiful girl was taken by force to the court of David, after she had already been betrothed to a youth in the village where she was discovered. David had no relations with her as the Bible testifies, but Solomon was very much in love with her and was therefore greatly wrought up when he was informed of Adonijah's passion for her. His efforts to win her love, however, proved futile and she was finally returned to her native village and reunited with her lover. The incident was here worked into a poem, in which the historical characters play their part in dramatic fashion. Numerous other suggestions have been made as to the meaning of the song, some even finding here a connected drama, with dialogues and action, while others see in it a collection of nuptial songs, such as are still in vogue in the Orient, strung together by the hands of a poet. The relation of this scroll to the Passover holiday, however,

can be found only in its allegoric interpretation, while the description of spring in the first chapter may have been an additional incentive for its perusal on the spring festival.

18

THE CROSSING OF THE RED SEA

The seventh day of Passover is associated in Jewish tradition with the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites when they fled from before the Egyptians. In the Bible the name *Yam Suph* (Sea of Reeds) is used for the Red Sea. The reason for calling this body of water, usually identified with the Gulf of Suez and Akabah, by that name is not clear, unless it is derived from the color of the red corals that cover its bed and line its shores. The name Red Sea is first found in the Apocryphal books, while the biblical name, *Yam Suph*, may refer to the reeds which may have grown on its banks at the time of the Exodus.

Many modern parallels have been brought forth to establish the naturalness of the crossing of the Red Sea. What the Israelites at that time and throughout their early history regarded as a miracle, a direct intervention of Providence in their behalf, has been demonstrated to be within the limits of possibility, and such action of the strong wind on the narrow parts of the Gulf of Suez occurred in more recent years according to the testimony of reliable authorities. The miracle consisted in the fact that the phenomenon occurred just at the time when and at the place where it was most needed.

On reaching the Red Sea, the Israelites perceived that they were being pursued by their former masters. The situation that confronted them appeared almost hopeless

and escape appeared impossible. Moses himself was in dismay and did not know what to do.

The rabbis relate that there were four different plans proposed by the leaders. One group favored suicide by jumping into the sea, regarding this as the only solution in their desperate state. Another group were determined to engage in a pitched battle with the Egyptians, even though they knew that the odds were against them. The timid and cowardly among them advocated submission and a return to Egypt and to slavery which they surely realized would be even worse than before. A fourth group thought that they might be able to frighten their pursuers by producing noise and confusion thereby making them believe that they had a much larger army than was suspected. But Moses silenced the arguments of all the contestants and implored that they have faith in God who will perform a miracle for them which will bring about their deliverance and the complete destruction of their enemies.

This speculation of the rabbis has been used by homilists throughout the ages to bring home a wholesome lesson to their people. It may again be used with considerable force in our own generation when the situation facing the Jewish people is in many respects similar to that with which our ancestors were confronted at the Red Sea. The conditions now are as desperate as they were then and the remedies proposed are not dissimilar to what the rabbis conceived to have been offered at that time. The enemy is determined to destroy the Jewish people or to reduce them to a state of virtual slavery. In their despair and utter helplessness, many of them have sought refuge in self-destruction even as some of our ancestors planned to do. Lacking the implicit faith in the kindness and justice of divine Providence, they find no other way out of their predicament.

There are some among us who believe that by instituting demonstrations, by making noise and proclaiming their

woes to the world they may succeed in bringing confusion to their enemies and in arousing the public conscience in their favor. Such tactics may succeed with some people and under certain conditions, but our enemies today have remained unaffected by these protest demonstrations and the world at large has almost become callous to our cries of distress.

The timid among us would submit to their lot and put their necks in the yoke placed upon them. They preach appeasement and submission, hoping to obtain mercy at the hands of their oppressors. Even when they see that their present foes are incapable of any human feelings and that their condition of servitude and degradation will not be alleviated in any manner, they still believe in submission and resignation to their lot.

Circumstances would make it impossible to contemplate an open battle with our tormentors, and this plan finds but scanty articulation among us. However, the thousands of Jews fighting now in the armies of the Allies in behalf of their countries do this with added zeal and with greater enthusiasm because of their knowledge that they are especially singled out for hatred and vengeance by the enemies of their countries and of their civilizations.

All of these methods of escape are not adequate and some of them are even dangerous. Faith in God and in the triumph of right, a faith that may be translated into definite acts of courage and valor, is the only safe course in our present misfortune as it was in the days of Moses. "Because of the faith that Israel manifested at the Red Sea they were permitted to sing the glories of God." With unshakable faith in a moral order of the universe, we shall maintain our hope and our cheerfulness and succeed in throwing off the yoke that is choking us and then sing a new song for the deliverance that is bound to come to us and to all humanity.

VIII

‘OMER DAYS AND SHABUOT (FEAST OF WEEKS)

"THE CHAPTERS OF THE FATHERS"

Beginning with the Sabbath after Passover, observant Jews read one chapter of the Mishnah treatise, *Pirke Abot*, every Sabbath afternoon, completing the reading of the book, which consists of five chapters, with an additional chapter known as the "*Baraita* of Rabbi Meir," on the Sabbath before Shabuot. Some continue this practice throughout the summer, thus going over this little book three or four times consecutively during the Sabbaths intervening between Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Although the treatise has been included in practically all the editions of the Prayer Book, it has never formed an integral part of the Synagogue service, but it was left to each individual to read these chapters either at home or in the synagogue. Translations of the book into the various vernaculars have been in existence for many centuries, and these were intended mainly for those who were unfamiliar with the Hebrew text.

The popularity of this small treatise of the Mishnah is evidenced by the numerous commentaries that have been written on it throughout the centuries. These commentaries were almost all of a homiletic nature, using the exalted ethical teachings contained in the volume for moral instruction and guidance. In recent years, however, more critical editions of this work have appeared, the most elaborate of these being that edited by Charles Taylor, in two volumes, which has become the classic edition of this work. It contains a most thorough comparison of all the printed editions as well as of all the available manuscript versions in

order to establish the correct text. It is strange that this as well as many of the other critical editions issued since then were produced by Christian scholars, the most recent being that edited by R. Travers Herford, an authority on the period of the Pharisees and well-versed in rabbinic literature. The only Jewish renderings of *Pirke Abot* in English are, besides the translation made by the Rev. S. Singer, which is included in the Singer Prayer Book, the edition with an English translation by Ben-Zion Halper and a Yiddish version by the poet Yehoash; a translation with brief notes by Rabbi J. Gorfinkle and another translation with notes by Rabbi Herbert S. Goldstein. An extensive commentary on the first chapter only was written by Dr. C. E. H. Kauvar. These are all published in handy volumes, and the notes give historical data as well as biographical sketches of the rabbis whose opinions are included in the text. An illustrated edition by Saul Raskin appeared recently which contains the Hebrew text, an English translation and numerous artistic designings.

Herford's edition was published under the auspices of the Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation and was provided with a lengthy introduction and with illuminating comments on the Mishnahs in the order in which they are found in the book. Mr. Herford had in mind primarily the Jewish reader, who should have the teachings of this volume presented to him from the Jewish point of view and in accordance with Jewish ideas. Christian interpreters, according to Herford, aim mainly to help Christian readers to a better understanding of the Judaism of the period covered by the New Testament, but they do not take the trouble to find out what "the Judaism of the Pharisees meant from the inside, and not merely what it looks like from the outside." Basing himself on a quotation from the Talmud which says that "he who would become a *Hasid* (a pious man) must fulfil the words of *Abot*," Herford suggests

that this treatise was recognized very early as containing the essential teachings of the rabbis. "The central conception of Pharisaism is Torah, the Divine Teaching, the full and inexhaustible revelation which God has made to His people. The study of Torah means much more than the study of the Pentateuch or even of the whole of Scriptures taken merely as written documents. It means the study of the revelation made through those documents, the divine teachings therein imparted, the divine thought therein disclosed."

It is quite true that the idea of study and investigation of the word of God is predominant in the teachings of this book, but the title often given to it as *Ethics of the Fathers* is not misleading, for the paragraphs of this treatise are replete with ethical maxims and adages that reveal a most highly developed state of morality. Without trying to present a system of ethics, the compiler collected all such sayings of the older teachers as had moral value and religious significance and put them together for the instruction and edification of all future generations. It is because of the essential human characteristics of these teachings that the book always made such a strong appeal to the Jewish mind, as embodying the most outstanding manifestations of the Jewish genius in the line of proper conduct and religious attitude, in which study and research into the word of God played a very conspicuous part.

The custom of reading these *Chapters* on Sabbath afternoons dates back to the Geonic period, and was in vogue probably as early as the eighth or ninth century. It is a custom that may well be revived now, for the quaint teachings and the trenchant adages are as applicable today as they were in those early days in the development of Jewish culture. Its perusal will reveal to the reader an inexhaustible source of moral guidance and of most exalted standards of life which are of eternal worth.

2

"THE COUNTING OF THE 'OMER"

"When ye are come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring the sheaf ('*Omer*') of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest. . . And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest (*Shabbat*), from the day that ye brought the sheaf of waving; seven weeks shall there be complete; even unto the morrow of the seventh week shall ye number fifty days." These passages (Leviticus 23.10, 15) and the parallel passage (Deuteronomy 16.9) are the sources for the custom, still in vogue, of counting the days, every evening immediately after the service, beginning with the second day of Passover and concluding on the evening before Shabuot. The word '*Omer*' used in the text, and rendered sheaf, has been taken to stand for a distinct measure (about seven and a half pints), described in another place (Exodus 16.36) as one-tenth of an *Ephah* (about one bushel); and the grain to be used was barley.

In its origin, this custom of counting the days is thus connected with the harvest, the period intervening between the barley and the wheat harvests, which extended for the seven weeks between Passover and Shabuot. Shabuot marked the conclusion of the grain harvest, and this was commemorated by the offering of two "loaves of waving" on the altar; while Sukkot marked the conclusion of the fruit harvest, when all the field's produce was safely stored in the barns.

The counting of the days is now observed in the synagogues by pronouncing a blessing, followed by the announcement of the number of days as well as the number of weeks that passed. Recognizing that the ceremony is

intimately connected with the agricultural life, and that it could have no real significance for the Jews in the diaspora, the rabbis, nevertheless, made it obligatory both as a remembrance of the past and as a promise for the future, when Israel will again return to the land of their patrimony and have their own harvest festivals. It has become customary, especially for women, not to undertake any work at sundown during this period. In the rabbinic *Aggadah*, Passover is regarded as the time when Israel was engaged to God, and Shabuot as the day of the nuptials. Just as the prospective bride counts the days between the engagement and the wedding, in her eagerness for the great day to arrive, so Israel counted the days in its yearning for the complete union with God which took place at Mt. Sinai. In this manner, Shabuot became connected with Passover also in the historical implications of these festivals.

Among all ancient peoples the harvest season was a time of joy and merrymaking and it was probably observed as such also by the ancient Israelites. In later times, however, a certain gloom was cast over this period, and the 'Omer days, except the days of *Rosh Hodesh* and *Lag b'Omer*, have been observed as days of semi-mourning, when no marriages may be performed and when no festivities may be indulged in. The reason for this custom is somewhat obscure, and no completely satisfactory explanation has thus far been offered. The medieval rabbis endeavored to connect it with the failure of Bar Kochba's rebellion against the Roman legions, basing themselves on a talmudic passage (Yebamot 62a) which declares that 24,000 disciples of Rabbi Akiba died during this period. The Kabbalists surrounded the custom with numerous mysterious speculations. Folklorists tried to connect it with a heathen superstition that marriages in the month of May were unlucky. The custom, however, is widespread among Jews, although there are some variations with regard to the days which are

excluded from the restriction. In some communities the restrictive laws apply only during the first thirty-two days, while in others they apply during the entire month of Iyar, with the exception of the 18th day, known as *Lag b'Omer*. The prevalent custom is to abstain from all joyous celebrations during the whole period between Passover and the New Moon of Sivan, the New Moon of Iyar and the thirty-third day of the 'Omer being excepted.

The eighteenth day of Iyar, the thirty-third day in the counting of the 'Omer days, is known as *Lag b'Omer* and is marked in the Jewish calendar as a semi-festival. There is no prescribed ritual for the observance of the day, and the reason for its festive character is not definitely known. Tradition relates that a plague which claimed many victims among the disciples of Rabbi Akiba (about 130 C. E.) ceased on this day, hence the day was declared as a semi-festival. It is for this reason that it is known as "The Scholars' Festival," and school children are allowed to enjoy a vacation and the students of the *Yeshibahs* are permitted to indulge in all sorts of amusements. The reference to the plague is probably a veiled reference to the participation of Rabbi Akiba and his disciples in the Bar Kochba rebellion. The observance of the 'Omer days as a period of semi-mourning is thus connected with Judea's last struggle for independence. The fact that many of the persecutions during the Crusades and later during the Cossack invasion of Poland (1648) occurred during this period, made the custom more widespread and more enduring.

Lag b'Omer, however, is observed as a semi-festival in all Jewish communities. The later Kabbalists gave to it additional significance by connecting it with the day of the death of R. Simeon b. Yohai, the reputed author of the *Zohar*, the classic work of the mystics. Even to the present day, the Jews of Safed, in Palestine, and the neighboring

settlements gather on this day near the village Meron, where the *Tanna*, about whom so many strange stories are related, is assumed to be buried. Special hymns of a Kabbalistic character are chanted and bonfires are made in the neighborhood of the traditional grave. They call the day "The Wedding Day of R. Simeon ben Yohai," because of the mystic idea that through his death, harmony among the different worlds in the universe was brought about.

The association of the day with the Bar Kochba rebellion has survived in the custom of school children preparing bows and arrows and practising to shoot with them, so as to be prepared for an emergency call when the opportunity for another uprising against oppressive rulers of Palestine should come. Referring also this custom to R. Simeon b. Yohai, the Kabbalists interpret it as pointing to the hope for the coming of the Messiah and the final redemption, the bow symbolizing the appearance of the many-colored rainbow which is expected to appear and announce the arrival of the future redeemer. Whatever the original reason for making the day a minor festival, Jewish tradition has succeeded in surrounding it with sufficient content and symbolism to make it fruitful of religious and nationalist sentiment.

3

THE DATE OF THE SHABUOT FESTIVAL

Although mentioned in all the sources of the Torah and included among the three pilgrim feasts, no exact date is set in the Bible for the festival of Shabuot. In one place (Deuteronomy 16.9) it is described as follows: "Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee; from the time the sickle is first put to the standing corn shalt thou begin to number seven weeks. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks."

This simply provides for the observance of the festival at the conclusion of seven weeks of harvest, which corresponds approximately to the period between the beginning of the barley harvest and the beginning of the wheat harvest. Somewhat more definite is the description in Leviticus (23.15, 16): "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest (*Shabbat*), from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the waving; seven weeks shall there be complete; even unto the morrow after the seventh week shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall present a new meal-offering unto the Lord."

The traditional interpretation has been that the term *Shabbat* in this case does not refer to the weekly day of rest but to the first day of Passover, and it is in accordance with this tradition that the rendering in the Jewish Publication Society's edition of the Bible is given as "the day of rest," which required a note to the effect that in the Hebrew text the word *Shabbat* is used here. In accordance with this interpretation, the festival of Shabuot has been observed on the sixth day of Sivan, the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover. This is further supported by the renderings of some of the oldest translations of the Bible, such as the Septuagint and the Targum, and by Josephus. The Sadducees took the word *Shabbat* in this connection in its literal sense and held the view that the seven weeks should begin from the Sabbath which comes during the Passover week so that Shabuot would always come on a Sunday, but not always on the same day of the month. The Karaites of the eighth century also adopted the same view and have been observing the festival on a Sunday, but on different dates. The same is also true of the small sect of Samaritans.

Another opinion obtained which, while translating the word *Shabbat* in the text as referring to the holiday, maintains that it meant the last day and not the first day of Passover, so that the counting of seven weeks actually

began with Nisan 22 and Shabuot would thus always come on the twelfth or fifteenth of Sivan depending on the number of days in the months of Nisan and Iyar. This view is apparently held in the Book of Jubilees, composed by a Palestinian Pharisee of the first century before the common era, and by the Syriac version of the Bible. It is actually followed by the Falashas of Abyssinia to the present time. This method of computation is obviously incorrect since the connection of the Shabuot festival with that of Passover is quite evident from the context and the "sheaf of the waving" was enjoined to be brought not after the Passover holiday but during the holiday, on the second day, according to the traditional rendering, or on the Sunday of that week, according to the Sadducean contention.

The connection of Shabuot with the Revelation at Mount Sinai is of later origin and is not mentioned either by Josephus or Philo. In the Torah, the day is designated as the "feast of harvest" or "the day of the first-fruits," or "the feast of weeks." It is also referred to as *Azeret*, the closing day of the Passover in the same manner as *Shemini Azeret* is the closing day of the Sukkot festival. The designation as "the day of the giving of our law," found in the prayer-book is of much later origin. The date of the Revelation also is not definitely given. The narrative (Exodus 19.1) of this event begins with the words: "In the third month after the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. . . and there Israel encamped before the mount." It is difficult to determine when the date for the Revelation was set as the sixth day of the third month (Sivan) and thereby associated with the old harvest festival of Shabuot. The rabbis endeavored by homiletic methods of interpretation to establish the date of the Revelation as Sivan the sixth, although the association of Shabuot with the Revela-

tion was to them an established fact. With the destruction of the Temple, the later historical reason gradually overshadowed the ancient agricultural significance which has been preserved only in a few of the ceremonies, as the decoration of the homes and the synagogues with flowers and plants. The name Pentecost was applied to the festival by the Greek-speaking Jews. The Christian festival of Pentecost as the day when the spirit was poured out upon the world is based on the passage in Acts 2.1, where it is said that this happened on the festival of Shabuot. In the Christian Church the festival always occurs on Sunday to correspond with Easter, but the tradition is that the event told in Acts took place on a Sunday, which then coincided with Shabuot. The relation between the outpouring of the spirit and the Revelation is quite obvious, and the emphasis placed there on the fact that the outpouring of the spirit was heard by the different nationalities, each one in its own language, is strongly reminiscent of the rabbinic legend that the Revelation at Mount Sinai was given in seventy languages, meaning all the vernaculars in vogue at that time.

4

THE SITE OF THE MOUNTAIN OF THE REVELATION

The biblical narrative describing the giving of the Ten Commandments, places the Revelation at Mount Sinai, in the Wilderness of Sinai. This wilderness is situated at the head of the Red Sea, between the Gulf of Akaba and the Gulf of Suez, the two arms of that sea. There are several mountains in this region, and Bible students have not as yet come to an agreement as to the exact site of the mountain which was the scene of the promulgation of the Law to Moses and to the Israelites. Indeed some scholars would

remove Sinai from the peninsula altogether and place it somewhere in Midian, or near it, with which Sinai is associated in a number of biblical incidents. However, the consensus of opinion is that the event took place in the traditional peninsula of Sinai and probably from the traditional mountain, now known as Jabal Musa (The Hill of Moses), the highest peak of which, known as Sufsafeh (the peak of the willow tree), is 6937 feet. This peak is regarded as the real scene of the revelation.

Recent excavations conducted in this region have brought forth many interesting details which make the whole incident most vivid. It has been established for some time that this whole district was Egyptian territory during the period of the Exodus. It contained important mines with ports of debarkation for ships coming from Egypt, and the country was intersected by trade routes. There are evidences of a highly developed civilization in the district and of forms of religion which are much more highly developed than the ancient fetishism of the primitive Arabs. These forms of religion were probably Egyptian, but there are also definite traces of a Semitic form of worship, very much like the kind prescribed in the Pentateuch for the Israelites. These discoveries were made by Professor Garstang, working as the head of the expedition under the leadership of Sir Charles Marston. The latest conclusions point to the existence in Sinai of a Temple of Serabit.

Sir Charles Marston presented a popular summary of these discoveries. According to this, the date of the Exodus is fixed as 1447 B. C. E., and the surmise is that the book of Exodus was written by contemporary authors, since writing was in common use among the Semitic workmen, who worked the turquoise mines in the Sinai Peninsula for their Egyptian masters. "Nearby was found the wonderful Semitic Temple of the Goddess Serabit. Pharaohs of

many dynasties had contributed to the building of this great Semitic sanctuary, but by far the most prominent of them all was Queen Hatshepsut. . . the princess who found the baby Moses in the bulrushes of the Nile, so that the connection with the Sinai temple becomes of startling significance." It was established by Sir Flinders Petrie that the worship in that Temple closely resembled the worship of the Israelites, so that when Moses asked Pharaoh to permit the Israelites to go a three days' journey into the wilderness, he probably had reference to this Temple. During his exile in Midian, Moses returned to the faith of his fathers, the monotheism of the patriarchs, and the forms of worship that he elaborated had as their model the worship of the goddess Serabit. The fact that many Semitic inscriptions were found there is an indication that the Israelites could write, and thereby the theory that the Torah could not have been a contemporary document is entirely refuted.

While extremely plausible, this theory has not yet been generally accepted and biblical scholars are awaiting further evidence that may still come forth from various sources hitherto unknown. The reading of the inscriptions, which Grimme established as referring to Moses "the son of Queen Hatshepsut," is contested by some scholars. Again, the fact that the Israelites of that period were able to write is no positive proof that the Pentateuch is the work of contemporary authors. However, the exact site of the Revelation is now placed at the traditional Jabal Musa, a tradition that is amply supported by recent discoveries. This entire region has been the seat of a number of monasteries and Christian sanctuaries from earliest times. It was in that place that the first fragment of the Hebrew Ben Sira was found by two English Christian ladies, which led to the discovery of the Cairo Genizah by the late Dr. Schechter.

5

THE DECALOGUE ON THE TABLES OF STONE

According to the account of the Revelation at Sinai, given in Exodus chapter 19, the Ten Words were pronounced by God in the hearing of the entire nation of Israel assembled at the foot of Mount Sinai. They were later engraved by "the finger of God" upon two stone tables, which were handed to Moses to deliver to the people. These tables were broken by Moses when he came down from the mountain, and saw the people engaged in worshipping the Golden Calf. Later, another pair of stone tables were engraved, either by God or by Moses, depending on the narrative in Deuteronomy or in Exodus, and these were deposited in the ark of the covenant for safe keeping. The paramount importance attached to this document is attested to by the elaborate description of the manner of its delivery, accompanied as it was by thunder and lightning and by the sounding of the *Shofar*, and the regulations that were to govern the people in preparing themselves for the great event.

The highly imaginative fancy of rabbinic legend still further amplified the supernatural character of the Sinaitic revelation. The Israelites were afraid to accept these laws and greatly hesitated when told by Moses what they were. They had to be cajoled and finally coerced into agreeing to accept the revelation. Moses first approached the women and acquainted them with the general principles of the Law, not only because women are more careful in their observance of religious laws, but also because they would instruct their children to follow the laws of the Torah. When God pronounced the first commandment, "I am the Lord thy God," all creation stood still, not a

leaf moved, not a bird sang, even the angels ceased their customary chants, so that there should be no interruption in the transmission of the sounds to the ears of the whole world. All the inhabitants of the globe heard the words pronounced, for God's voice was heard in all the seventy languages spoken by men, so that all nations might hear and understand the laws promulgated. The discrepancies found in the Decalogue as given in Exodus and Deuteronomy are explained by the rabbis on the ground that both forms were uttered simultaneously in one divine utterance.

The designation "Ten Commandments," is not quite accurate according to the Jewish tradition. Ten Words, or Decalogue, is the more correct name according to the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, Jews count the first sentence, "I am the Lord thy God," as the first Word, while the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches adopted the method of combining this with verses 3 to 6 into one commandment, and dividing the last verse into two, making the coveting of your neighbor's wife the ninth, and coveting your neighbor's house the tenth. The three commandments prohibiting murder, adultery and theft are variously arranged in some of the ancient codices. The Septuagint and early Christian codices have murder, theft and adultery; Philo has adultery, murder and theft; while the Vatican Codex has adultery, theft and murder. Some also divide the second commandment into two, one the prohibition of polytheism and the other the prohibition against making molten images, disregarding the first as no commandment at all. In this they have the support of some rabbinic authorities as well as of Philo and Josephus. The famous Nash Papyrus, which was discovered about forty years ago and is thought to be the oldest example of square characters in a Hebrew manuscript, dating back to the

second century, seems to follow the Septuagint arrangement of the Ten Commandments.

The theory of the Bible critics that the Decalogue could not have been the work of Moses, but that it emanated from the prophetic schools of the eighth century before the present era, is now discarded by most Bible scholars. The differences in the texts of Exodus and Deuteronomy, especially the striking difference in the reason given for the observance of the Sabbath, has been interpreted in various ways by modern critics. Of course, the traditional view is, as indicated above, that both forms were given by God at the same time. The modern view is that Moses was the author of the document as we now have it, but that he presented it in a much simpler and briefer form than that in which it is now found. This ancient text was later elaborated by the editors of Exodus and of Deuteronomy, respectively, in accordance with their points of view and attitudes towards religion. This view holds that the reasons given in the second, third, fourth and fifth commandments were not in the original Mosaic document. Among early Jewish commentators, Abraham ibn Ezra seems to be the only one to admit that the variations in the texts of Exodus and Deuteronomy are due to linguistic peculiarities, and hesitatingly declines to accept the view that both of them are of divine origin in the form in which they are found now. Maimonides, following the rationalistic method of Bible interpretation, says that the Israelites did not really hear God's voice, but some sound especially created for the purpose of proclaiming these words. Some believe that the divine voice pronounced only the first two commandments, which are put in the first person, while the other eight were pronounced by Moses at the behest of God. The number of letters constituting the text of the Decalogue is 620, cor-

responding to the 613 commandments found in the Torah and the seven additional laws later introduced by the rabbis.* Hence the Decalogue is assumed to contain within itself all the laws and precepts of Judaism.

6

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

It is customary to divide the "Ten Words" into two classes: laws regulating the relations between man and God, and those regulating the relations between man and man. The belief in God, the exclusion of any visible representation of Him, the prohibition against swearing falsely, and the Sabbath, especially as given in the Exodus version, are directly connected with the religious life. According to some authorities, even the law requiring regard for parents is considered to be more closely allied to the religious than to the ethical obligations. The last five commandments are all connected with the moral life of the individual in his relation to his fellows. While the first four involve definite action and carry with them prescribed punishments, the last one, about covetousness, may be regarded as merely a warning against the lack of self-control and could hardly be punishable, since it is entirely a matter of emotion.

The rabbis sensed the difficulty inherent in the last commandment, as they did also regarding the passage

* These seven laws are all of a positive nature and include institutions that had their origin in pre-rabbinic times. These are 1. The pronouncements of benedictions before partaking of any enjoyment in life; 2. The washing of the hands before meals; 3. The lighting of the Sabbath lights, 4. The regulations regarding Erub, a symbolical ceremony or act by which the legal fiction of community or continuity is established, whereby one is permitted to carry objects from one place to another on the Sabbath or prepare meals on a holiday for the Sabbath, etc., 5. The recitation of the *Hallel* on holidays; 6. The lighting of lights on Hanukkah; 7. The reading of the *Megillah* (the Book of Esther) on Purim.

“And thou shalt love the Lord thy God.” They do not fall into the class of commandments or laws. The rabbis, therefore, said that the term “covet,” as used here, implies a desire for possession without proper remuneration, which will eventually lead to the violation of any or all of the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments. When this inordinate desire leads to the violation of any of these laws, the person is punished not only for the commission of the sin, but also for the desire preceding it. The plain meaning of the text, however, is that we should not desire things that belong to others and are not for sale. It is impossible to legislate either for or against an emotion, which may come up spontaneously, but the legislator here enjoins against entertaining it and seeking to realize it. As ibn Ezra explains it, the rustic boy would hardly entertain the wish to marry a princess, since she is so far removed from his immediate sphere. In just such manner should each of us regard the property that belongs to our neighbor. To the ethical person, robbery and theft are inconceivable, and when such a desire comes to him he is quick to suppress it, as it appears to him utterly unattainable. Some of the rabbis, however, consider the desire itself as sinful, and would even forbid a person, who desires to make a purchase, to dangle money in front of the prospective seller in order to stir up his desire for money. The outstanding example of the evil consequences of covetousness is the story of Ahab in connection with the vineyard of Naboth, which led to many sins, including false testimony, perjury and murder. One exception to this law is recognized by the rabbis. Not only is one permitted to desire to possess the learning and wisdom that another has, but one is also encouraged to entertain such a feeling. “Jealousy among scribes increases knowledge,” and this is explained by the following example: If two men barter a dress for a diamond, only one of them is in possession of each article. On the other hand, if two

students engage in learning, one teaching the other a lesson which is unknown to him, and the other returning the favor by teaching his neighbor a lesson which was hidden from him, both are enriched. The Torah cannot be bartered in the sense that the one who sells becomes deprived of it. Both buyer and seller are enriched by the transaction, so that in this case to entertain a desire to possess the wisdom and learning that another possesses is not a desire to take anything away from the other.

In order to justify calling the Decalogue by the name "commandments," a term that cannot be applied to the first sentence, the Catholic version of the Bible combines the first and second commandments into one and then advances each number until it reaches the tenth, which it divides into two, so as to make up the number ten. Thus "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, etc.," becomes the tenth. This is also followed in the Lutheran version, but the Greek Church and the reformed denominations follow the Jewish division.

7

LEGENDS ABOUT THE REVELATION

Popular fancy loved to dwell on the details of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai, the most significant event in the early history of Israel. Many of the legends and stories gradually found their place in the mass of Jewish traditions included in the Talmud and in the Midrashim. In Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews*, nearly forty pages are devoted to the stories clustering about this event.

Israel was chosen to receive the Revelation simply because all other nations to whom it was offered refused to accept it on the ground that they would not submit to the

rigors of its moral laws. Israel, however, joyfully submitted to all its prescriptions because they have been trained in their observance. Many of them had also been practised by the patriarchs. Yet, in spite of the readiness with which the Israelites were willing to accept the Torah, God asked them for some security that they would abide by their promise. Several offers made by them were rejected for one reason or another until they offered their children as hostages. The children with one accord undertook the responsibility to urge their parents to observe the laws of the Torah.

Sinai was selected as the place from which the Ten Commandments were promulgated, although other mountains much taller and more stately vied for the great distinction. Hermon, Tabor and Carmel each sought the honor of having God's presence rest upon it and each enumerated the reasons why it deserved preference. Their offers were rejected because of their pride, and Sinai was chosen because of its lowliness and humility. Sinai and Moriah at one time belonged together, when Isaac was about to be sacrificed by his father Abraham. Sinai separated itself from Moriah and chose for itself a spot in the wilderness where it served as the place on which God allowed His presence to rest. Moses, the humblest of men, was designated to present God's law from the humblest of mountains, thereby emphasising the great virtue of humility.

Another version has it that Israel was not willing to accept the Torah, and force had to be used in order to coerce them to accept it. When the entire nation stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, God lifted up the mountain and held it over their heads like a basket, and said to them: "If you accept the Torah it will be well with you, otherwise your grave will be under the mountain," whereupon the people cried: "All that the Lord hath said, we will do and be obedient." The reason why the Revelation took place

in the wilderness was to indicate that the Torah is free to all, even as the wilderness has no ownership. The Revelation was promulgated in the third month, which has the sign of *Gemini* (twins) in the Zodiac, to indicate that it was not only for Israel but also for his twin brother, Esau, the progenitor and symbol of the Gentile world.

In interpreting the passage (Exodus 19.3) "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel," the rabbis said that Moses was first to acquaint the women with the principles of the Torah in a mild and gentle manner, and then give the details in harsher terms to the men. The women were to be told first because, in the case of the Garden of Eden, Adam alone was given the command and then Eve tempted him to transgress God's precept. Now, therefore, the women were appealed to first so that they might influence the men to obey the laws. Women are also more scrupulous in their observance of religious laws and it is within their province to instruct their children in a strict adherence to the Torah. These are the reasons why Moses appealed first to the women.

Only the first two commandments were heard by Israel directly from the mouth of God, the other eight, at the request of the Israelites themselves, were transmitted to them through the agency of Moses. The Ten Commandments were engraved on the two tables of stone which were transparent and could be read on both sides. The rabbis found striking similarities between the first five and the last five commandments. The murderer destroys the image of God engraved on every human being. Conjugal faithlessness is as grave a sin as idolatry. Theft leads to false oaths. The violation of the Sabbath is like bearing false testimony against God that He did not create the world. Honoring father and mother is impossible in the case of the one who indulges in lust and whose children will not recognize him as their father.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

The custom of reading the Book of Ruth during the services on the festival of Shabuot is of great antiquity. This idyllic prose-poem, in which a picture is drawn of ancient Hebrew life in times of peace and plenty, describing in such beautiful detail the harvest season in ancient Judea, was appropriately chosen to be read on the day commemorating the harvest. This was the primary significance of Shabuot, as its designation in the Bible as *Hag ha-Kazir*, the festival of the harvest, indicates. The notable event of that little book, the attachment of Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her famous declaration whereby she professed her desire to become a member of the Jewish people and an adherent of the Jewish religion, was interpreted as conversion to Judaism, and this was the additional reason given for the reading of this story on Shabuot when it assumed the second significance, that of commemorating the revelation at Mount Sinai.

In the Greek and Latin translations of the Bible, as well as in the King James version, the Book of Ruth is placed immediately after the Book of Judges, because in the first sentence of the book the story is said to have occurred during the period of the Judges. The rabbis regarded Samuel as the author of the Book of Judges, of Ruth and of the two Books known by his name. In the Hebrew Bible, however, the Book of Ruth is included among the Five Scrolls, read in the synagogue, and placed among the Hagiographa. The grouping of the Five Scrolls together and the order in which they are found, are of later origin, suggested by the use made of them in the synagogue ritual. The Song of Songs, read on Passover, comes first and is followed by Ruth, read on Shabuot, Lamentations read on Tisha b'Ab,

Ecclesiastes read during the Sukkot festival and Esther read on Purim. The order of the scrolls in our Bible now thus follows the order of the festivals in the calendar.

Many of the modern Bible critics regard the Book of Ruth as of much later origin than the time of the Judges, ascribing it to the period of Ezra and Nehemiah. The critical opinion is that the book was written by someone opposed to the drastic measures taken by Ezra against intermarriage with foreign tribes, and in this story the unknown author aimed at establishing the fact that intermarriage with foreign tribes had not been looked upon with disfavor in early times and that out of one such marriage, namely that of Ruth and Boaz, the beloved hero of the Jewish people, King David, descended. While the theory appears plausible, the simple style of the narrative and the purity of the diction in the book point to a much earlier period for its composition.

Though in general antagonistic to proselytism, the rabbis beheld in Ruth the righteous proselyte and held her up as a model to all future converts to Judaism. The reluctance with which Naomi viewed Ruth's desertion of her home and early surroundings, and the arguments which she used to dissuade her from taking that step, are still further elaborated upon in the Midrash. She was told by Naomi of the many difficulties connected with the observance of Jewish law, of the rigidity of the morality practised among Jews, of the many disadvantages that would confront her after renouncing her former religion and people; but Ruth was firm in her resolve. Naomi still hesitated, and it was only when Ruth exclaimed: "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God," that Naomi consented to have Ruth follow her to Judea. Ruth's devotion to the minute practices of the Jewish law and her purity and chastity won for her the love and admiration of Boaz. Ruth followed Naomi's instructions explicitly and it was thus

that she was able to maintain herself and her purity in the midst of the many temptations with which she was beset while out in the field gleaning. Although the biblical law prohibits intermarriage with Ammonites and Moabites (Deuteronomy 23.1), even to the tenth generation, the rabbis made this apply only to the males of the tribes, but not to the females, so that the marriage of Boaz and Ruth was entirely within the Jewish law. The other relative of Naomi, nearer of kin, did not know of this distinction and, therefore, refused to marry Ruth; but Boaz, who was conversant with the law was ready to enter into the compact as soon as he heard of the refusal of the nearest relative, who had the first claim on Elimelech's property if he consented to marry Ruth. This was in accordance with an ancient custom in Israel, probably antedating the law of the levirate marriage given in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, although the symbolic ceremony of the renunciation of certain rights is similar in both cases.

Whether the purpose of the book was, as assumed by modern critics, to protest against Ezra's activity in eradicating the evil of intermarriage, or whether it was to indicate the humble origin of King David, the story has enough intrinsic worth and beauty to make its frequent perusal and study delightful and beneficial. A quiet, peaceful atmosphere pervades the narrative. It pictures the husbandman at his work, after the labor of the plowing and sowing has begun to manifest its results in the products of the soil. It further shows the practical workings of the charity laws of ancient Israel, the provisions made for the support of the poor and the needy at the time when God's blessings have been showered upon the landowner. Ruth was one of the many landless poor who found sustenance and support, both for herself and her aged mother-in-law, from the ears of corn that the reapers let drop

on the ground or from the corners of the field which the owners were not permitted to harvest. It was through the practice of these laws that the rich farmer was constantly reminded that he was not the sole master of his possessions and that the blessings that come to him must be shared by him with those who are less fortunate. The romantic side of the story, primitive and crude though it is, also reveals the high standard of morality prevalent in Israel even at that early age.

9

THE *AKDAMUT* HYMN

The *Akdamut* hymn, which is read responsively by the reader and the congregation on the first day of Shabuot after the Torah is taken out, is one of the finest poetic productions in the synagogue liturgy. It consists of ninety lines, each one ending in the syllable *ta*, arranged in a double alphabetic acrostic with the name of the author, also in acrostic, in the end. It is written entirely in Aramaic and is intended as a hymn of glory to the Lawgiver, the friend of Israel, who prepared for them the glorious messianic future as a reward for their observance of the laws of the Torah. Beginning with the praises of God, which cannot be recounted by a feeble human being, the poet indulges in most fanciful hyperboles.

Were the sky of parchment made
A quill each reed, each twig and blade,
Could we with ink the oceans fill,
Were every man a scribe of skill,
 The marvelous story
 Of God's great glory
Would still remain untold.*

* The English renderings quoted here are taken from the *Festival Prayer Book* published by the United Synagogue of America. The version was prepared by Rabbi Joseph Marcus.

The poet stretches his imaginary powers to the utmost limits in describing the numberless joys that await the righteous in the "End of Days." The pure and upright will be arrayed in the presence of the Almighty on chairs of pure gold. In front of them will flow streams of finest oil, and they will partake of the wine made of the juice of grapes preserved since the days of creation. The Leviathan and the Wild Boar, after they shall have been killed in a terrific struggle, will be served to them at this great feast. The greatness and glory of Israel come from their acceptance of the Law and their adherence to it, in spite of the many obstacles placed in Israel's way by the nations round about them.

We are His choice,
Then let us rejoice
That He blessed us and gave us the Law.*

The author of this sublime song is Rabbi Meir ben Isaac Nahorai of Worms, one of the most noted synagogue poets of the eleventh century. He composed a number of hymns, many of which have been included in the standard collection of the *Mahzor*. He is referred to with a great deal of respect and admiration by his contemporaries and also by later authorities; even Rashi speaks of him in the highest terms of praise. He probably was the official precentor (*Sheliah Zibbur*) of the community of Mayence and later of Worms, although he is also mentioned as a preacher (*Darshan*) and as an authority on Jewish law. He died before 1096, the year of the first crusade, when his son Isaac and his wife were killed in Worms by the crusaders. A curious myth is related by Bodenschatz in his *Kirchliche Verfassungen der Juden* about the author of the *Akdamut*. He says that the poem was composed by a Jew who came from the other side of the river Sambatyon, the legendary river which casts up stones every day of the week but rests on the

* See note on page 244.

Sabbath, thus proving the exact time of the Jewish day of rest. After this Jew had had a dispute with a Christian and had succeeded in convincing the latter of the superiority of the Jewish faith, he composed this glorious hymn in praise of the Torah and of Judaism. Zunz refers to this story as a *Maerchen*, a myth, but the fact that such stories have grown up around this song and have reached the ears of a Christian author is an indication of the esteem in which the poem was held by Jews, even centuries after its composition.

The entire hymn is in Aramaic, and the name Nahorai, by which the author is known, is also nothing but an Aramaic rendering of his first name, Meir. Aramaic was the Jewish vernacular throughout the period of the Second Commonwealth and later until the conquest of Babylon by Omar (about 640), so that we may say that the great bulk of the Jewish people used this language in their every-day speech for a period exceeding a thousand years. It has later come to be recognized as a sort of sacred language, second in importance to the Hebrew, so that the Torah portion of the week had to be read twice in the original and once in the Aramaic translation (*Targum*). Several prayers in Aramaic, notably the *Kaddish*, have been preserved in the regular ritual of all the various Jewish rites. Of course, the Talmud and a great deal of later rabbinic literature are written largely in this language, so that the Jews were not unfamiliar with it even after they ceased using it as a vernacular.

10

THE SHABUOT CONFIRMATION SERVICE

The Confirmation ceremony, which is now extensively practised in all Reform and Conservative synagogues, is admittedly borrowed from the Protestant Church. Among

Roman Catholics, the Confirmation ceremony constitutes a sacrament, connected with some mystical significance and believed to have a definite effect upon the seven-year-old child. The Lutherans rejected the ceremony, and instead established the Confirmation rite, which indicates merely the assumption of church membership by the child on passing the age of early childhood. In other Protestant denominations this rite is entirely unknown, and even among the German Lutherans it had not become an established ceremony until the eighteenth century. The early Jewish reformers, realizing the gradual disintegration of the *Bar Mizvah* ceremony, adopted the Confirmation rite from the Lutheran Church and gave it Jewish meaning and significance. As early as 1810, a Confirmation service for boys was held in Cassel, and in 1817, the first Confirmation for girls also was held in Berlin and the following year in Hamburg.

The *Bar Mizvah* ceremony also had its origin in Germany, and is not older than the fourteenth century, according to some authorities. The term itself, in the sense in which it is now used, does not occur until that time, although there are several indications in the Talmud that at the age of thirteen the boy is expected to assume responsibility for his actions and becomes a full-fledged member of the community. The outward signs of such recognition on the part of the community consisted in having him counted among the ten needed to constitute a quorum for religious services, in permitting him to wear the *Tefillin* during services and in conferring on him the honor of being called up to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue. It is also quite likely that at the age of thirteen the boy was transferred from the elementary school to the higher school and the act was accompanied by an examination of his fitness for the promotion. This gave rise later to the *Bar Mizvah Derashah*,

the public address that the boy was expected to deliver on the occasion, either in the synagogue or at home, consisting of a *pilpulistic* dissertation whereby the intelligence and the knowledge of the young candidate were proved. Often the boy was also taught to read the section of the Torah before the congregation, or the *Haphtarah*, or both, depending on his abilities and his knowledge.

The German rabbis of the early nineteenth century, unwilling to give up this ceremony entirely, and at the same time realizing that it was impossible to maintain it in its older form in the period of emancipation, when Jewish children no longer devoted as much time to Jewish studies as they had formerly, turned to the rite practised among the Christians of their time and adapted it to the needs of the synagogue. Even some orthodox rabbis submitted to the pressure of the times and sanctioned the introduction of the ceremony in their congregations. Notable among such orthodox rabbis were Rabbi Loeb Berlin, in Cassel, and Rabbi Solomon Eger, in Brunswick. For the most part, however, the ceremony met with violent opposition on the part of the great majority of the orthodox population, on the ground that it was un-Jewish in name and in its main features. Graetz, who was no friend of Reform in practice, criticized Israel Jacobsohn, who was the first to introduce this ceremony, for placing "insipid German songs by the side of the Psalms pregnant with thought, and the ceremony of confessing the faith (Confirmation) for half-grown boys and girls, an idea without meaning in Judaism." The opposition became so strong that in 1836 the Confirmation was prohibited by the Prussian Government, and in 1838 by the Bavarian Government. However, by that time it had already spread to many provinces in Germany, and had been adopted in Denmark and in France, and a little later also in America. In many cases the confession of faith was made a prominent feature in the ceremony, and

still is, despite the incongruity of such a profession in Judaism. Such confession has gradually been eliminated, and the ceremony has assumed more and more the nature of a graduation from the elementary Jewish school, with the religious element predominating. At the beginning, the ceremony was held on various days of the year, but now it is almost universally observed on Shabuot, the festival commemorating the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai.

11

SHABUOT CEREMONIES

Unlike the other festivals of the Jewish calendar, the Shabuot feast developed but few ceremonies. Apart from the liturgy in the synagogue, which differs but little from that of the other festivals, and the prohibition of labor, no distinctive observances were associated with the day in ancient times. It was only during the last century that Shabuot was selected by the Reform synagogue as the most appropriate day for the Confirmation ceremony and through that the festival assumed greater meaning in the localities where the ceremony is observed. In medieval Germany, Shabuot was the day on which the Jewish boy was initiated into the study of the Torah and this initiation was accompanied by an elaborate ceremony which was carried out partly in the synagogue and partly at home.

The prevalent custom of eating dairy products and cakes made with milk and cheese is of ancient origin, and is associated with the figure of speech frequently found in the Bible, which compares the Torah to milk and honey. As a result of this custom, Jewish housewives have developed some delectable dishes prepared with dairy products, as

well as cakes and pastries made with milk and cheese, which are served during the festival.

The memory of the agricultural origin of the feast is kept alive in the floral decorations introduced into the synagogue and into the homes. It was customary to spread grass over the floor of the synagogue and also on the window sills in the homes, and otherwise to decorate the homes and the synagogues with plants and flowers.

The agricultural aspect of the festival as the "Day of Harvest" or the "Day of the First-Fruits" was gradually replaced by the historical significance, that of the Day of Revelation, especially after the Jews had been exiled from Palestine and forced to live the life of wanderers. The *piyyutim* (liturgical hymns) included in the Shabuot services have but few references to the harvest; they deal mainly with the wonders of the Revelation. The six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah, including three hundred and sixty-five negative laws and two hundred and forty-eight positive laws, have been arranged in rhyme by a number of writers, and several of these found their way into the Prayer Book. These *Azharot*, or enumerations of the commandments, are recited in the Ashkenazic ritual during the *Musaph* or additional service in the morning, and in the Sephardic ritual they are chanted in the afternoon. Through the influence of the *Kabbalah*, the custom arose of remaining awake throughout the first night of Shabuot and reading portions of classical Jewish literature. These selections have been included in a book, entitled *Tikkun Lel Shabuot* and contain from three to seven verses from the beginning and from the end of every section (*Sidra*) of the Pentateuch; some selections from the Prophets and the Hagiographa, the Mishnah, the *Sefer Yezirah*, the 613 commandments as arranged by Maimonides and selections from the *Zohar*. Some chapters, notably the Decalogue, are read in extenso, as is also the Book of Ruth.

After the conclusion of these readings, which occupy the major portion of the night, many would take a ritual bath and then proceed to read the morning services. After the synagogue services, they would assemble in their homes for refreshments, indulging in the fine dairy viands prepared by the pious housewives.

Those who are under the impression that Jewish life in the Middle Ages was barren of all joy labor under a great misapprehension. They had their days of pleasure and material enjoyment, although they were careful to associate them with their religious duties. Shabuot, like Simhat Torah, was a festival of gladness, especially among the scholars and students of the Law. R. Joseph, one of the early Babylonian *Amoraim*, would arrange for a very elaborate dinner on Shabuot, saying: "If not for this day, how many Josephs could be found in the street!", meaning that the Torah, given on that day, makes the distinction between the student and the ignorant person.

12

FLORAL DECORATIONS ON SHABUOT

Shabuot closes the spring season, when nature is in bloom, trees and flowers blossoming forth to the delight of man. In Temple times, the first fruits (*Bikkurim*) were offered on the altar by the pilgrims from all over Palestine. The baskets of fruit that were carried in procession from the remotest corners of the land were decorated with leaves and flowers. The rose was the most favored flower, especially the rose of Sharon, which the rabbis designated as the "royal flower," because of the frequent mention made of it by King Solomon in the Song of Songs. It is probably from this ceremony that the custom arose later, first men-

tioned in the fourteenth century, of decorating the synagogue with plants and flowers on the festival of Shabuot. In Safed, the custom prevailed in the seventeenth century for the sexton of the synagogue to distribute fragrant plants to every worshipper in the synagogue during the morning services of the day. In European synagogues it was customary for young boys to bring into the synagogue, after the *Amidah* service, bundles of fragrant, fresh grass and scatter them over the floor. In other places, roses and lilies, as well as other sweet-smelling blossoms, were scattered on the floor of the synagogue. In many homes, too, this custom was observed and, in some, green grass or plants were placed on the window sill to delight the eye of the passer-by.

According to rabbinic tradition, the world is judged concerning the fruits of the tree on Shabuot, hence the custom prevailed to place growing trees in the synagogue, so that the people may be stirred to pray in their behalf. The Gaon of Vilna, however, looked with disfavor on this, since it appears like aping the Christian custom on their Pentecost. The usage at present is to place large plants as well as cut flowers on the pulpit and on the window sills of the synagogue. While this is undoubtedly associated with the primary idea of the harvest festival, the rabbis found in the custom also an element reminiscent of the Revelation. The green that predominates in the flowers and the plants is to remind us of the green mountain of Sinai, from which the law was given to Israel on that day. They thus blended the two memories that the day was to recall in the ceremonies connected with its observance.

The appreciation of flowers by the ancient Jews found expression in numerous figures of speech in the Bible and in the Mishnah. Nearly all the works of art that survived the destructive hand of the ages bear one or another floral symbol. The candelabrum in the Tabernacle had nu-

merous flowers engraved on it, while the Temple of Solomon had flowers wrought in gold on various objects. The rabbinic Agada relates that various aromatic trees made of gold stood in the Temple of Solomon and with the movement of the air they produced fragrant perfumes. The famous casuist, R. Judah b. Ezekiel, the founder of the academy in Pumbeditha, declared that one should pronounce a benediction when first beholding trees in blossom. This blessing, included in our prayer books, reads: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who hast made thy world lacking in nought, but hast produced therein goodly creatures and goodly trees wherewith to give delight to the children of man." Special blessings are also to be said on inhaling the fragrance of plants, fruits or flowers. Although the Bible contains only about one hundred names of flowers, the Mishnah has twice as many additional names, in pure Hebrew, and even these do not exhaust the flora of Palestine.

It is quite likely that the reason for the reading of the Book of Ruth on Shabuot was its beautiful description of the harvest season in Palestine. The reading of the scroll is preceded by a benediction and in the Sephardic communities of the East it is often accompanied by the chanting of an Arabic rendering. The idyllic picture presented here of the early harvest made the reading of this book most appropriate for the season.

13

DAIRY DISHES ON SHABUOT

The culinary art developed among Jewish women in connection with the observance of the holidays. Under the influence of the seasons of the year in which the holidays

occurred and the customs and natural products of the various lands where they lived, certain dishes became characteristic of certain holidays. Passover, of course, with its distinctive diet, restricted by the law governing the unleavened bread regime, stimulated a number of original dishes. Even the fast days of Yom Kippur and Tisha b'Ab have some definite dishes connected with the meals before and after the fast.

It was probably after these peculiar dishes had become popular and were widely accepted that the scholars, and later the mystics, endeavored to give some historic or religious significances to them. Some of these appear to us now rather puerile and obviously artificial, although many others are of a nature to arouse religious sentiments and to emphasize historic events.

For the Shabuot festival, coming at the end of the spring season, and often coinciding with warm weather, dishes prepared from dairy products were found to be accessible and more palatable. Since the holiday lacks any other distinct observances such as those prescribed for the other two pilgrim feasts, special meanings were attached to this custom which became associated with the historic significance of the day, the Revelation on Mount Sinai.

In several places in the Bible, the Torah is compared to milk, as it is indeed likened also to some other delicious beverages, hence the partaking of a milk diet on the day was interpreted as symbolic of the event that became the chief reason for the observance of the holiday. One of the more realistic commentators gives the following reason for this custom. The Israelites in the wilderness, after their return home from Mount Sinai, could not prepare a meal made of meat which requires considerable time for preparation. They therefore resorted to milk food which was at hand, and as a memorial of this we also indulge in milk dishes on the day when this event is commemorated.

While meat and fish should be the main ingredients of the principal meals taken on festivals, since only these articles made a festive meal, on Shabuot the meat meals were supplemented or replaced by the Jewish housewife with a variety of dainties prepared with milk. The law required an interval of six hours between meat and milk meals, but this was relaxed for this holiday. Cakes and cookies prepared with milk were used especially in the morning, after the services.

Mystic speculations had their share in influencing the types and the forms of these delicacies made of milk and butter. A cake made in the shape of a ladder with seven rungs was emblematic of the seven heavens through which God passed to reach Mount Sinai. The Torah, which is composed of three parts (Law, Prophets, and Holy Writings), was then given to a people which has three castes (*Kohanim*, *Levrim* and *Israelim*), through Moses who was the third child of his parents (Aaron and Miriam preceding him), on the third month (*Sivan*), after three days of separation (*Sheloshet Yeme Hagbalah*). The bread loaves used on the festival were made to symbolize the two loaves of white bread offered on the altar on Shabuot and their four points indicate the four methods of study of the Torah (PaRDeS: the literal, the one derived by intimation, the homiletic and the mystic).

Honey was also an important ingredient in the preparation of the Shabuot milk foods, because the Torah is often compared to honey. The ceremonies connected with the initiation of the child to the study of Hebrew, held on Shabuot during the Middle Ages, included many dainties made of milk and honey. The slate which was presented to the child, having the first four and the last four letters of the alphabet on it, was covered with honey which the child was told to lick off. A cake made by a young girl, prepared of the finest flour with oil, milk and honey, had

a number of biblical passages inscribed upon its surface, and was given to the child together with a boiled egg bearing similar inscriptions. The significance of the holiday as the occasion of the giving of the Torah impressed itself on both old and young, and the joy and pride in being members of a nation to whom this precious treasure was entrusted became enhanced and deepened through these numerous ceremonies.

14

KING DAVID'S YAHRZEIT

While the first night of Shabuot is spent by pious Jews in staying awake and reciting selections from the entire Written and Oral Law, the second night is spent by some Jews in reciting the Psalms of David in commemoration of the anniversary of his death. Tradition has it that David died on a Sabbath which coincided with the festival of Shabuot. The custom of reading the Book of Ruth on the festival, in which the genealogy of King David is traced to the Moabitish girl who followed her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Judea and avowed her devotion to the God of Israel and to the people of Israel, still further associated the name of David with the festival of Revelation.

David, "the king after the heart of God," has been the favorite hero of Jewish story and legend throughout history. The story of David is found only in the Books of Samuel and of Chronicles, but references to his greatness and prowess are found in every book of the Bible subsequent to his days. The record in Samuel appears to be contemporary and historical, while the description in Chronicles reflects the idealized picture of the King as preserved in the minds of later generations. In the former, David is painted in the

colors of an oriental despot, unrelenting and ambitious, heroic and adventurous, possessed of a simple faith in God, just in his dealings with others and also with himself, conscious of his shortcomings, and ready to admit them and to seek forgiveness for them. In the second account, all that is offensive in his character is glossed over or entirely omitted, while his great piety and outstanding natural gifts are stressed. He is described there as devoted especially to the preparations for erecting a magnificent Temple for the worship of God and to the details of the organization of the liturgy, the proper administration of the functions of the priests and the Levites, and to preparing the plans for the Temple which he transmitted to his son Solomon after he was told that he would not be permitted to erect the house of God. Here we evidently have the record of a popular conception of a great national hero at a time when his weaknesses and sins were forgotten and only his great services to the nation were treasured in the memory of a grateful people. Sinful acts on the part of ancient monarchs were not infrequent, but the author of the Books of Samuel obviously felt it his duty to record David's crime with the condemnation it merited. It may have been a common practice among other peoples, but a king of Israel must not be guilty of such an offence. The rabbis naively explain David's sin on the ground that God sought to establish thereby the great effect of repentance on man's character. David would otherwise never have stooped to such a crime. They further mollify the severity of the crime by declaring that Bath-Sheba was really a divorced woman at that time, since it was customary for all soldiers before departing for battle to grant their wives a conditional divorce. Uriah was guilty of treason and deserving of death. The incident also served to humble David's pride and exalted opinion of himself and to show him how frail and unreliable his own character was. However, while

the rabbis declared that one is in error who imputes sin to David, they did not hesitate to declare that many of his family troubles and keen disappointments were a punishment for this sin.

Stripped of the legendary material inspired by excessive veneration on the part of subsequent ages, the figure of David still stands out as that of a hero, a wise king and a lovable man. He is far from the company of saints and was not much ahead of his time and environment in morals and in the concepts of duty, but he was a true friend, inspiring confidence and love among all who came in contact with him. Brave men risked their lives to fulfil an implied wish of his, although he would not indulge in the pleasure made possible by their sacrifice. His friendship with Jonathan has become a pattern of devotion for all times, and his elegy on the deaths of Saul and Jonathan breathes genuine admiration and deep regret. He manifested nobility of character when he spared the life of his arch-enemy Saul, when he could have made an end to all his troubles by doing away with him. He was very anxious to demonstrate that the death of Abner was not caused by his command and not committed even with his knowledge. He showed the exuberance of his joy on the occasion of the restoration of the Ark by mingling freely with the people, disregarding the chidings of his princess wife who looked upon such "democratic" display with disdain, and he was ready and willing to listen to words of rebuke from the prophet or from a wise woman. His indomitable courage is traced back to his youth when he was still tending his father's flocks, and his wars with other tribes became the marvel and wonder of all subsequent times. As a ruler he accomplished most for his people. He consolidated the tribes into a compact nation, extended the territories of his dominion and obtained peace and security from the marauding tribes that pestered Israel for many years. No wonder

that the Jewish people saw in him the ideal king, the model for the future Messiah, who is regarded as one of his descendants.

In some places in rabbinic literature it is assumed that King David himself will be the future Messiah, which gave rise to the belief that he never died and is waiting for the propitious moment to appear as the expected redeemer of Israel. "David, King of Israel, liveth and existeth" became a favorite slogan (see Rosh Hashanah 25a). The phrase also found its way in the ritual for the Sanctification of the New Moon (*Kiddush Lebanah*).

IX

FASTS OF TAMMUZ AND OF AB

TAMMUZ—A JEWISH MONTH AND A HEATHEN DEITY

THE name of the fourth month of the Jewish year and the tenth month of the old civil year, Tammuz, as all other names of the Jewish months, was taken from the Babylonians (*Du-mu-zi*) and is not found in the Bible. The word, however, is found in Ezekiel as a designation of a Babylonian deity. In a vision, Ezekiel was taken to Jerusalem and shown the many crimes that the Israelites were committing, especially in relation to idolatry within the Temple precincts. Among other abominations shown him, Ezekiel saw women weeping over Tammuz (8:14). In the Babylonian mythology Tammuz occupied a prominent position. He was the god of productivity, the favorite of the goddess Ishtar, and represented to the ancient Semites the yearly decay and revival of vegetable life. This god, who was later adopted by the Greeks under the name of Adonis, which is simply the old Semitic word for "My Lord," was represented as passing away from this earth every year to take up his abode in the gloomy, subterranean world. His mistress, Ishtar, the great mother-goddess, remained disconsolate at his disappearance and followed after him to *Sheol*. While she was away, all desire for reproduction in men, beasts and plants ceased and nature was threatened with destruction. A struggle followed the attempt of Ishtar to rescue Tammuz from the hands of Allatu, the goddess of the lower regions, but finally Ishtar prevailed and she came back to the world with her beloved Tammuz, whereupon nature was resurrected. The observance connected with the worship of Tammuz consisted mainly of public laments and weeping over the departure

of the god. Many elegies and plaintive hymns have been preserved in which the bereaved Ishtar laments over her beloved and these hymns were chanted by women priestesses who, during the fourth month of the year, named after the god, conducted public lamentations over his departure. It was to this cult that Ezekiel had reference when describing the various idolatries into which Israel had sunk in the last days of the First Commonwealth.

Through the Phoenicians, the Tammuz myth came to Greece, where the name Adonis was given to the hero of the story, with whom Aphrodite was infatuated. Instead of the struggle between Ishtar and Allatu over the possession of the youthful Tammuz, we have a similar struggle between Aphrodite and Persephone, the Greek mistress of the nether world, for the possession of Adonis. Zeus is called in and makes a compromise between the warring goddesses, but later Adonis is slain by a wild boar and Aphrodite then laments over the death of her beloved. The myth in slightly differing versions is found also among the Egyptians and among the Arabs. Modern students have elaborated these myths in their discussions on comparative religions and found that all of them relate to the waning of the summer solstice.

2

THE FAST OF TAMMUZ

The fast day known as the Fast of Tammuz, is regularly observed on the seventeenth day of the month; but when this day comes on a Sabbath, when fasting is prohibited, the following day is kept instead. This is one of the four fasts regarding which the prophet Zechariah (8.19) foretold that they would be turned into days of joy and festivity in the future. All of these commemorated certain phases of

the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Babylonians in 586 B. C. E. and were apparently observed as fast days by the Jewish exiles in Babylon, and perhaps also after the return under Zerubbabel.

The specific event commemorated by the fast of the seventeenth day of Tammuz was the breaking through of the walls of Jerusalem by the enemy. According to the narrative in II Kings 25.3 and Jeremiah 52.6, this occurred on the ninth day of Tammuz, after a siege of the city, lasting for about one and a half years, during which the besieged Judeans put up a desperate struggle to maintain their independence and to ward off the onslaughts of Nebuchadnezzar and his armies. Lack of food in the city, however, made it impossible for them to continue their stubborn resistance and the Babylonians were able to penetrate into the city where for a month the carnage continued, until the ninth day of Ab when the Temple was reduced to ashes and the remaining Judeans were taken captive to Babylonia. Six centuries after that event Jerusalem was again besieged by the Roman legions under Vespasian and Titus, and its inhabitants were again subjected to the harrowing experiences of famine and death. The record of this heroic resistance of the weak nation to the trained Roman army with its many instruments of destruction has been preserved for us by Josephus, an eyewitness and important factor in that war. Tradition remembers the date of the breaking into the walls of Jerusalem during the Roman siege as the seventeenth of Tammuz, hence the observance of the fast day was shifted from the ninth to the seventeenth, as it would have been too much of a hardship to observe as fast days two days so close together.

An ancient Jewish document, the *Megillat Ta'anit*, enumerates four other sad events in Jewish history that occurred on this day. These are the breaking of the tables

of the Ten Words by Moses, when he came down from the mountain and saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf; the stopping of the daily offering in the Temple; the burning of the Torah and the placing of an idol in the sanctuary by Apostomus. The first mentioned event was established by calculation of the dates in connection with the experiences of the Israelites during the first year of their sojourn in the wilderness. The second event probably occurred when animals became scarce during the long siege and the two daily sacrifices could no longer be kept up regularly. With regard to the next two incidents there is quite a variety of opinion among historians. Josephus relates that, about twenty years before the final destruction, a Roman soldier seized a scroll of the Torah and burned it in public. This caused great excitement among the Jews and might have led to a premature rebellion had not the procurator Cumanus executed swift justice by having the soldier beheaded, thereby placating the multitude.

Others, however, would place the event in an earlier period, during the Maccabean revolt, and some even attempt to identify Antiochus Epiphanes with this Apostomus, since it is known that Antiochus set up a statue of Zeus in the Temple precincts and that Torah scrolls were burned during the persecutions which he instituted. This seems to be the most plausible explanation of the reference, although many other conjectures have been offered from time to time. Just as in the case of Tisha b'Ab, tradition piled up incidents of Jewish history and associated them with the day which had already been observed as a day of mourning and fasting.

3

THE THREE WEEKS OF MOURNING

The period of mourning for the destruction of the Temple extends for three weeks, beginning in a milder form on the seventeenth day of Tammuz and increasing in rigor with the approach of the ninth of Ab. No festivities are permitted during these three weeks. Marriages may not be entered into, and even engagements may not be contracted unless there is no feast accompanying them. The rabbis were rather lenient with regard to engagements and permitted them even on the Fast of Ab, for the reason "Lest another man forestall him," another form of the maxim that all is fair in love and war. One is not to put on a new garment, or partake of a fruit eaten for the first time in the season, nor is one to cut his hair during the entire period. Some people even abstain from meat and wine throughout the three weeks, although the great majority abstain from these only during the first nine days of the month of Ab.

With the entrance of the new moon of Ab all these regulations become more stringent. Bathing, cutting the finger-nails, washing clothes, building a new house, and many other matters of this kind are avoided. Meat, or food prepared with meat, is not permitted except in case of sickness or in the case of one with whom milk diet does not agree. On the Sabbath preceding the Ninth of Ab (*Shabbat Hazon*), the *Haftarah* consists of the first chapter of Isaiah which is read in a mournful tune, similar to the tune in which the Book of Lamentations is read on the Ninth of Ab. On the fast itself, which begins at sunset on the previous day, the observance is as rigorous as on the Day of Atonement.

It is observance of this kind that helped to keep the spark of national sentiment aglow in the hearts of the Jewish

people. The atmosphere of mourning created by the observance prescribed for this period both gave expression to the Jewish feeling toward the past of Israel and helped to intensify the loyalty and strengthen the patriotism and devotion of the average Jew to his ancestral land and to his people. Although removed by thousands of years from the catastrophic event which deprived him of his independence, the Jew is made to feel close to his origin and to his past by means of these observances and ceremonies. It is true that many of them are no longer observed as strictly as they were in former years, and that to many Jews the whole idea of mourning and fasting is rather strange and lacking in reality. The memory that these ceremonies intend to call forth is as vivid and as real today as it was throughout the centuries mainly because our ancestors clung to the observances and made them part of their lives. The rigor of the three weeks is becoming lessened in modern days, and in some quarters it is even argued that, with the prospect of a speedy return of the Jewish national life in Palestine, the whole idea of mourning for the destruction of the Temple should undergo drastic revision; but the institution which existed for so many centuries and which left such an indelible impress on the consciousness of the Jewish people has performed a great service in maintaining the national spirit and the Jewish attachment to the past and to the hope for the future.

4

TISHA B'AB

“A day set for misfortunes” is the designation given to the ninth day of Ab by the rabbis. Besides the destruction of the first and second Temples there have become associated with this day numerous other tragic incidents in Jewish history. The destruction of the city of Bethar, which termin-

ated the heroic uprising of Bar Kochba against the Roman power under Hadrian, is also said to have occurred on the same day. The day set by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain for the exile of all the Jews from that land in 1492, an event regarded as next in tragic importance to the exile of the Jews from their own land, was also the same, the fateful ninth of Ab. It is thus that the elegies (*Kinoth*), recited on Tisha b'Ab in the synagogue contain, not only dirges descriptive of the national calamities in connection with the destruction of the Temple and of the Jewish national life, but also such as were composed at later periods, mourning other catastrophes in Jewish history that occurred at different times. The elegy of the Ten Martyrs bewails the death of outstanding personalities who were martyred for their faith and their loyalty during the Hadrianic persecutions subsequent to the Bar Kochba rebellion. There are also dirges commemorative of the sufferings of many Jewish communities in France and in Germany during the first crusade, the famous elegy of Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg bemoaning the public holocausts of books of rabbinic learning on the market place of Paris, as a result of the Maimunist controversy, and other chants that had in view incidents of grief and sorrow in later Jewish history. It seems that the rabbis felt that if all the misfortunes of Israel were to be commemorated on the special days of their occurrences the calendar would be inadequate, since it had not enough days to commemorate them all. They have, therefore, singled out this day and made it symbolic of all the sorrows and sufferings of Israel throughout the centuries. In the course of time, Tisha b'Ab has literally become the "Black Fast," recalling black and dismal pictures of defeat and misfortune, of harrowing sufferings and the tragic helplessness of a people bereft of its home and forced to live in the midst of enemies who regarded it meritorious and profitable to persecute and harass them.

The underlying principle in the observances prescribed for the day is that of mourning. Every Jew is to look upon himself on this day as a child who has lost his parents and should observe all the laws of mourning that pertain to the mourner. One must not bathe or anoint or wear shoes on that day, even as the mourner is prohibited from doing these things. One must not greet his friend on that day with the customary greetings, and when accosted by one who is ignorant of the law, one should reply in subdued tones, with bent head, as is the custom of mourners. It is not even permitted to study the Torah on Tisha b'Ab, since such study is supposed to bring cheer and joy to the student. Only the Book of Lamentations, the Book of Job and certain sad chapters in Jeremiah may be studied then. Perhaps the fact that the absorption in the study of intricate passages of rabbinic lore might detract from the gloom of the day, was an additional reason for the prohibition against study, which was extended also to the afternoon of the day preceding the fast. The use of black draperies in the synagogue, especially in the Sephardic communities, was intended to deepen the gloom and to intensify the feeling of loss that Jews should experience on this day of sad reflections and memories.

One of the most prevalent customs connected with Tisha b'Ab is that of visiting the cemeteries immediately after the conclusion of the morning service. In some communities in the Orient, the custom is to visit the graves of famous men and the reputed resting places of the saints and prophets of old. The legend that the patriarchs and all the great men of the past rise from their graves on that day and join Israel in lamenting over the glory that has departed from them is the reason usually given for the ceremony. There is also a midrashic legend, on which one of the most touching *Kinoth* is based, that describes the pilgrimage of

Jeremiah to the graves of the patriarchs, imploring them to intercede in behalf of Israel and to avert the evil decree. Perhaps this thought gave rise to the custom of visiting the graves, praying that the pious and purified dead may act as intermediaries in the prayers for a speedy restoration. In some towns in Poland it is customary for young boys to arm themselves with little wooden swords when they accompany their elders to the cemetery and to insert these swords in the graves. This has been explained to denote that the dead are reminded that they should avenge themselves on the enemies of Israel and are thus symbolically provided with the weapons necessary for such vengeful acts. Many superstitious acts and beliefs have grown up in connection with the observance of the fast, but most of these may have had a purely poetic significance originally or may be given such romantic meaning now.

In the midst of the deep gloom and overwhelming grief, called forth by the observances and the memories of the day, there is a strain of optimism, of confidence and of hope that has kept the Jewish soul from losing itself in despondency. "He who mourns for Jerusalem will live to behold its rehabilitation." By remembering the past, by reflecting in sorrow over the sad fate of our ancestors, we are knit more closely to that past, we preserve our solidarity, out of which alone we may hope to achieve survival through the realization of the promises of the prophets for the future glory of Israel.

5

TITUS IN HISTORY AND LEGEND

The popularity enjoyed by Titus was probably due not so much to his own kindness of heart and high ethical standards as to the complete depravity of Titus' brother

Domitian, in comparison with whom Titus was looked upon as a saint. His Roman contemporaries spoke of Titus as the "love and delight of mankind." The legend that gained publicity and is still repeated by historians that Titus would say "I have lost a day," when a day passed in which he did not perform some act of kindness, probably grew out of his extensive generosity to his friends and supporters on whom he was wont to shower costly gifts frequently. He was fortunate in his early environment, having been brought up in the household of Claudius and of Nero and thus trained in all the courtly accomplishments as well as in languages and music. He was handsome, vigorous, but self-indulgent, profligate and cruel. Feuchtwanger's depiction of him in his novelized life of Josephus comes much closer to the truth than the prejudiced accounts pro and con of both the Roman and the Jewish contemporaries respectively. Josephus himself, an underling in Titus's retinue, who made every effort to whitewash his character in the history of the time, could not point to any outstanding act of mildness and kindness in the life of the general and later emperor. His wanton destruction of lives is given as a matter of course, since this was expected in times of war.

The story about the burning of the Temple is a case in point. Josephus tells of the many attempts made by Titus to persuade the Jews to surrender, in some of which Josephus was the intermediary. No substantial promise of forbearance was included in these offers and naturally they were all turned down by the zealous fighters within the walls of Jerusalem. After the walls were wrecked and the Roman legions penetrated into the city, it is related by the Roman historians that Titus forced the burning of the Temple against the hesitation of the Roman generals who wished to let the sanctuary stand because of their respect for all shrines. Josephus, on the other hand, relates that

Titus was opposed to the destruction of the Temple, out of his regard for Berenice, the sister of Agrippa, against the insistence of the generals that it be burnt, and that he even ordered the flames, which had already been started by the hands of a Roman soldier, to be extinguished. On the tenth of Ab, however, the flames could no longer be checked and when Titus wished to enter the Holy of Holies, he was driven back by the smoke. Ever anxious for popular approbation, Titus broke his promise to marry Berenice and sent her back to Palestine after she had come to Rome in the expectations of becoming his wife. His reign extending a little over two years is noted for the many improvements in the city of Rome, for extensive generosity to the people in the time of a pestilence and conflagration which affected large districts of the empire and for the many intrigues in the household against him by his brother Domitian. The verdict of history is on the whole favorable to him, although the many exaggerated epithets attached to his name should be discounted.

It is not at all strange that the Jews of the period should have placed the blame for all their misfortunes upon him who followed his father Vespasian as the leader of the army of invasion and who effected the final destruction of their land, their sanctuary and their independence. In rabbinic literature, he is spoken of as *Titus ha-Rasha* (the wicked) and is classed together with Nebuchadnezzar and other enemies of the Jews. In the later, Amoraic, period, the stories about him are rather confused, but his cruelties against the defenseless are given in great detail and his blasphemies against the Jewish religion are recounted. He is said to have pierced the veil of the Holy of Holies with his sword, whence blood spurted on him, and to have defiled the Scrolls of the Law which he found there. Out of the veil he made a large receptacle for the holy vessels,

including the candlestick, the table of shewbread and many of the gold and silver vessels of the Temple. When he travelled with these back to Rome, a storm arose and the ship was about to founder. Then he said: "The God of these people is apparently strong only on the water; as he drowned Pharaoh in the sea so he wants to drown me also. Let him only come out on dry land and wage war with me and he will not be able to withstand me." In reply to this he was permitted to proceed, but when he landed a gnat entered his nostrils and caused him much suffering for the rest of his life. His melancholy state after his triumphal return to Rome is probably the origin of this legend which is also repeated in Arabic sources. The Arch of Titus, which is still one of the important relics in Rome, standing on a hill overlooking the Forum, depicts Roman soldiers adorned with laurels, carrying the spoils of the Temple in triumphal procession. The candlestick is still quite prominent, as is also the table of shewbread on which are deposited the golden trumpets and two tablets fastened on staves, probably representing the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. On another side, Titus is represented standing upright in a car drawn by a female figure, representing the city of Rome. The tradition is that no Jew ever passed through the arch throughout the years.

6

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

The Arch of Titus, still occupying a conspicuous position in Rome, facing the Colosseum on one side and the Forum on the other, bears mute testimony to the great importance that the ancient Romans attached to the subjugation of Judea in the year 70 C. E. This arch is the only one that survived, but there was also another arch erected

to celebrate the great victory, and there were coins and medals struck in honor of the great event. In the triumphal procession of Titus and his army, many trophies of the Temple in Jerusalem were carried aloft by the conquerors, and seven hundred of the most handsome Jewish captives, including several of their leaders, were made to grace the procession. The ceremonies included the sacrifice of Simeon bar Giora to the war god of the Romans. Mighty Rome, then at the very peak of its glory, thus regarded the conquest of Judea as a tremendous achievement, and celebrated the crushing of this small principality in distant Asia with outbursts of jubilation and exultation.

The revolution broke out in full force during the procuratorship of Florus, the most cruel and most unprincipled Roman governor in the long list of bloodthirsty and unscrupulous procurators who ruled Palestine. It seems that the Jews felt then that they could lose nothing by an open rebellion against Rome, since the sufferings and persecutions to which they had been subjected were beyond human endurance. In fact, Florus himself apparently welcomed such an uprising, which might serve as a screen to hide his numerous misdeeds, for which he might be brought to account before the Roman tribunals. The voice of the wise counsellors, the disciples of Hillel, who urged peace with Rome at all costs, was silenced, and the Zealots and the revolutionary spirits gained control of affairs in the capital as well as in the provinces. The constant annoyances by the Roman soldiery, the attempt at interference with Jewish religious convictions, the heavy taxes and extortions by the appointed officers of the procurator, poured more oil on the flames, so that by the year 67 the rebellion was in full swing and Florus and his garrison were driven out of the precincts of Judea. Although entirely disorganized, lacking all military training and experience and the muni-

tions of war, the newly formed Jewish army was able to repulse the attack of Cestius Gallus, the Governor of Syria, who came with an army of 30,000 men to quell the rebellion. The idea in the mind of the Roman officials that they could make short work of the uprising and mete out exemplary punishment to the offenders proved disappointing. After a few months Rome realized that it had a difficult task before it, requiring the talents of the best of its generals and an unlimited supply of men and implements. The famous Roman general Vespasian, with a large army, was sent to the scene and after his election as emperor, his son, Titus, aided by the best generals of the Roman legions, was entrusted with the difficult task.

The Jewish people were not prepared for war, and their leaders did not underestimate the powers of the formidable foe. The divisions of opinion, the jealousies and bickerings among the various leaders, the lack of a centralized, powerful government to provide the sinews of war, all these made it apparent from the very beginning that, if Rome should persist, it would be impossible for the Jews to win. The greatest drawback was the people's distrust of their leaders. The internal government of Palestine had been in the hands of the Roman party, the aristocracy and the priesthood, who courted the favor of Rome and who persisted in their cries for peace even when it had to be purchased at the high price of actual slavery and loss of all self-respect. These were naturally looked upon by the common people with suspicion and even with animosity, but other great leaders, who could inspire their confidence, did not arise at the time to take their place. At one time, Josephus might have become the hero of the revolution, but being himself an aristocrat and perhaps somewhat sceptical as to the results of the war, he became disliked even in his own province in Galilee and finally surrendered to the enemy.

For three years, weak, hungry and leaderless Judea continued its strife against mighty Rome and the heroism displayed by its people was the marvel and admiration even of their enemies. The story of the siege of Jotapata, in Galilee, as depicted by Josephus and by other historians, is sufficient testimony to the perseverance, courage and fortitude of the unfortunate Jewish sufferers. If there had been a Judah Maccabee to lead the Jewish rebellion, a man whose sincerity of purpose and complete faith in the righteousness of his cause were so contagious as to inspire the most unworldly Hasidim to take up weapons and fight with him and under him, Jewish history might have been entirely different.

7

THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS

The reading of the Book of Lamentations on the Fast of Ab dates back to the most ancient times, possibly to the Babylonian Exile. In medieval times the reading of the book was accompanied by a translation into the vernacular and this is still done in Cairo and Morocco where the Book of Lamentations as well as the Book of Job are given in an Arabic rendering. At one time it was the custom to make an announcement prior to the reading of this book to the effect that so many years have now passed since the Temple was destroyed and the redemption has not yet come because of our sins. This announcement also was made in the vernacular. During the reading, to this day, the reader is seated or lies recumbent on the steps leading to the ark; he begins the chant in a whisper and then raises his voice in the mournful and appealing chant provided for this scroll. The synagogue is kept in semi-darkness, the worshippers sitting on the floor or on low chairs or benches in

their stockinged feet, frequently responding to the reading of the cantor with a sigh or with an ejaculation of grief and sorrow.

The Book of Lamentations consists of five chapters, the first four of which are alphabetical acrostics. The first, second and fourth chapters have twenty-two verses each, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, while the third has sixty-six verses, each letter of the alphabet having three brief verses. The last chapter, although also consisting of twenty-two verses, is not an acrostic. Each of the five chapters forms a complete whole and is independent of either the following or the preceding chapter. They all deal with the same subject, but in each chapter the matter is treated in a different manner. The description of the misery and woe of the people contained in all these chapters implies that they were written either by an eyewitness or by such as lived very close to the time and the scene of the catastrophe which befell Israel. The fact that the poems are highly artistic and are arranged in the somewhat artificial form of the acrostic is no evidence that they could not have been written under the weight of the burden of sorrow, "amidst blackened ruins where the fire had hardly cooled, and in the streets where the blood had hardly dried." It is entirely conceivable that a poet, or even Jeremiah himself, who remained with the miserable remnant that gathered around Gedaliah, after the best people of the nation had been driven to Babylon, should indite poems out of the depth of his sorrow yet in the artistic design we find in this book.

While all traditional sources ascribe the Book of Lamentations to Jeremiah and in the Septuagint version it is even joined to the Book of Jeremiah, modern critics are of the opinion that Jeremiah could not have written these poems. After one reads all the arguments and intricate proofs

adduced to disprove the authorship of Jeremiah, one remains unconvinced. Indeed, even some of the more recent critics have begun to doubt the hypothesis and are inclined to go back to the traditional theory which is supported not only by the rabbinic authorities and the superscription of the book in the Greek and Latin translations, but also by a verse in the Book of Chronicles. There (II Chronicles 35.25) we read: "And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing men and singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations unto this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel; and behold, they are written in the lamentations." While this is not conclusive proof, it certainly indicates that at the time of the chronicler, about the third century before the present era, a collection of lamentations had been in existence which was ascribed to Jeremiah. Because the five chapters are not in any way connected, modern critics supposed that the poems were written by different authors, as if one poet could not deal in different forms and at different times with the theme of sorrow which affected him personally and whose victims he saw on every hand. The rabbis drew pictures of Jeremiah lying on the ruins of Jerusalem and there uttering these elegies. One rabbi believed that these poems were composed after the first deportation in the days of Jehoiakim.

Throughout the book, the idea of resignation and submission to God's will prevails, recognizing that the punishment that befell Israel was fully deserved, although the cup of bitterness is full to overflowing. The distress of the city of Jerusalem, personified as a mother lying prostrate after being deprived of her children, is most effectively depicted in the first chapter. On the other hand, the hope for God's mercy and the confidence in His justice, that He will not permit His chosen ones to see complete annihilation, are

stressed in the third chapter, made up of brief sentences and breathing a fine religious spirit of faith and hope. In the last chapter, which reads like a prayer, God's mercy is invoked to grant redemption to Israel, to avenge all the wrongs done to Israel by their enemies and to restore the erring and the sinful to the service of God and the recognition of His power and goodness. "Turn Thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. Thou canst not have utterly rejected us, and be exceeding wroth against us." Thus while the grief was still poignant, while the ruin and destruction were still smouldering and the awfulness of the disaster was still facing the people, the poetic seer did not abandon himself to his grief but held out hope and assurances to the distracted and forlorn remnant in the desolate countryside of Judea.

8

THE MIDRASH TO THE SCROLL OF LAMENTATIONS

The homilies of the rabbis centering around the text of the Book of Lamentations are included in the Midrash *Echah Rabbati*. This collection is regarded as one of the oldest of the midrashic compilations, and is replete with poetic imagery and with extravagant picturesqueness. The main topic of discussion is naturally the destruction of the Temple which, in the mind of the rabbis, was not an event merely of political significance, but one involving the justice and compassion of God Himself and touching upon the most vital conceptions about God and His interest in Israel. Admitting that Israel's sinfulness was the primary reason for the disaster which came upon them, the rabbis pictured God in a state of utter dejection on beholding the fate that has befallen His children through the cruelties of His own

emissary of vengeance. They do not discriminate between Nebuchadnezzar and Titus, grouping together the calamity of the fall of the first Temple with that of the destruction by the Romans.

The graphic description of the moment when God became aware of the destruction of the Temple is a poem of exquisite beauty and touching pathos. The figures used by the rabbis are often extremely anthropomorphic, borrowed as they were from the human relationship with which they were familiar, so that they appear almost blasphemous to the mind of the purist. God would not be deterred by the pleadings of the most exalted angels in His lamentations over the misfortune of His people. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses, summoned by Jeremiah to come and witness the ruin that befell their children, plead with God, reminding Him of their own loyalty and devotion; but their arguments, though conceded, could no longer obviate the fate decreed against Israel. Rachel then comes and taunts God for His jealousy of the idols which Israel worshipped. She said: "Look at me. I was the favorite of Jacob, and it was for my sake that he agreed to work for my father for seven years. My father then plotted to exchange Leah for me and that plan was known to me and still I did all in my power not to disgrace my sister. If I, who was but dust and ashes, restrained my feelings of jealousy in order not to put my sister to shame, Thou, the everlasting and compassionate King, shouldst surely be able to resist the jealousy against gods which have no value." It was then, after listening to the plea of Rachel, that God said: "For thy sake, O Rachel, I shall restore Israel to their homes" (compare Jeremiah 31.14-16).

Jeremiah who had been in prison by order of Zedekiah was liberated by the Babylonians after the city was captured. Nebuchadnezzar's general, Nebuzaradan, was entrusted with the custody of the prophet and instructed to take good

care of him. Jeremiah, however, would not benefit by the king's favor and wished to partake of all the tortures which were meted out to his people by the cruel captors. Nebuzaradan argued with him that, since his prophecies had proved true, he should have nothing to complain of; besides, by exposing himself to danger, he was jeopardizing his, Nebuzaradan's life, as the King would surely punish him should anything happen to the prophet. Jeremiah was then persuaded to return to Jerusalem and share the fate of the remnant left there under the leadership of Gedaliah. It was during this journey that he had the vision of the woman weeping and crying in a loud voice. She then revealed herself as Mother Zion, weeping for her children, and Jeremiah assured her that just as she was deprived of her children, even as Job was, she will again be reunited with them even as fortune dealt kindly with Job. This vision forms the subject of one of the most touching elegies included in the book of *Kinot* chanted on Tisha b'Ab.

Thus we have here in the midst of the dark and gloomy pictures, drawn by master hands with such loving and deep feeling, the glimmer of hope and of cheer that has never been absent in Jewish folklore or in the Jewish consciousness. Judea is our inheritance, no one can take it away from us. No matter how sinful we may be, no matter how heavy the punishment imposed upon us may be, we shall not be alienated from our patrimony. God is our Judge and also our Father. His decrees may be severe and exacting, His anger at our wickedness may bring dire punishment, but His mercy endures forever and His promises will never be violated.

THE ELEGIES FOR THE NINTH OF AB

In addition to the reading of the Book of Lamentations on the Fast of Ab, the distinctive feature of the synagogue service is the chanting of the collection of dirges and elegies known by the name of *Kinot*. The biblical Book of Lamentations naturally formed the chief feature of the service from earliest times. In the evening, soon after the regular evening prayers, the precentor, seated on the steps leading to the Ark, would read the scroll in a low penetrating tone, with the traditional plaintive chant.

In the course of time, additional chants and songs, composed by the poets of the Middle Ages, followed the reading of the scroll. Only a few of them are recited in the evening, but during the morning service the collection of dirges now constituting a separate book, and varying with the different rites, consumes several hours, often until noon. Many of these possess genuine poetic beauty and all of them are filled with a great love for Zion and the deep sorrow over its destruction. The chief theme of these *Kinot* is the loss sustained in the destruction of the Temple and the consequent impossibility of worshipping God in the prescribed manner.

A number of these elegies deal with the misfortunes that befell Jews in more recent years, especially the persecutions and massacres of Jewish communities in Europe during the first crusade (1096), during the black plague (1348) and other such dark days in Jewish history. The burning of wagon loads of copies of the Talmud on the market place in Paris, in 1244, and in many another place subsequently, formed the theme of at least one of the *Kinot*. Never do we hear a note of doubt or resentment against God. All the woes of Israel, indeed, come from God, but these are

in full accord with His justice. Israel suffers because of his sins and God's mercy is certain to manifest itself as soon as Israel will turn away from his evil ways and return to virtue. It is for this reason that many of the *Kinot* are couched in the form of warnings to Israel and urge him to repentance, picturing in roseate colors the future that is in store for the people who with all their hearts return to the service of God.

The famous poem of Judah Halevi, known as the "Ode to Zion," breathing an overpowering love for the Holy Land, depicting the poet's yearning to touch its soil and to visit its sacred ruins, and his hope for a restored Jerusalem and a rejuvenated nation, is included in almost all the rites. In fact, it served as a model for many another poet, in later days, to construct poems in the form and meter as well as in the sentiments expressed in this great poem. Here are a few lines of this song, in the excellent rendering made by Alice Lucas:

Art thou not, Zion, fain
To send forth greetings from thy sacred rock
Unto thy captive train,
Who greet thee as the remnants of thy flock? . . .
Thy air is life unto my soul, thy grains
Of dust are myrrh, thy streams with honey flow;
Naked and barefoot, to thy ruined fanes
How gladly would I go:
To where the Ark was treasured, and in dim
Recesses dwelt the holy cherubim . . .

These outpourings of fervid love and devotion are properly reserved for the end of the service, when the anguish of the spirit is somewhat lightened by the strain of hope for a speedy redemption. It is also in harmony with this thought that the advent of the Messiah was expected on Tisha b'Ab, and the afternoon was given over to hopeful

cheer in the expectation of the speedy realization of Israel's dreams of the centuries.

In some communities in medieval times, the synagogue service consisted of the reading of the Book of Lamentations and the Book of Job, while the later *Kinot* were chanted in the home. In most Ashkenazic communities, however, the morning service is recited as usual, although without *Tefillin*, and, after the Torah is returned to the Ark, the *Kinot* are chanted, thus indicating that these are distinct from the regular service.

10

TISHA B'AB CUSTOMS

The month of Ab, the fifth month of the Jewish year, has been regarded as a period of mourning since the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B. C. E. When the exiles returned to Jerusalem and were permitted to rebuild the Temple, they wanted to know whether they should continue to observe the "Fast of the Fifth" with the mourning ceremonies as they had been accustomed to do in Babylon, and the prophet, Zechariah, told them that the fast days commemorative of the destruction of the Temple should be turned now into feast days and days of rejoicing. But when the second Temple was also destroyed in this month, by the Romans, and later when the Bar Kochba rebellion was quelled by Hadrian, with the destruction of the city of Bethar on the same day, the ninth day of Ab became again a day of mourning and fasting. Another word was added to the name of the month, through the anticipation and the hope for comfort and consolation, in the great faith that the Temple would again be rebuilt and Israel restored to its land. "*Menahem Ab*" (He who comforts Ab) became the name by which this month was

designated in the latter Middle Ages, while the Sabbath immediately following the Fast of Ab became known as *Shabbat Nahamu*, "the Sabbath of Consolation," after the first word of the *Haphtarah* from Isaiah 40 read on that day. *Menahem* is also one of the names by which the Messiah is known in rabbinic literature.

The gloom surrounding the Fast of Ab deepened as the day approached and especially during the periods of persecution, which extended throughout the Middle Ages, until the nineteenth century. The fast was to be observed with the same rigor as the Day of Atonement and was to last for twenty-four hours, unlike other fast days which began with sunrise and ended with sunset. Not only eating and drinking, but also bathing, anointing, and other forms of physical pleasures are interdicted. Hence, children were given a vacation from school on the afternoon of the eighth and the whole day of the ninth of Ab.

On the afternoon of the eighth day, the custom is to eat but a very modest meal, consisting of not more than two courses. After the meal the head of the family sits down on the ground, in stockinged feet with ashes strewn on his forehead, and eats dry bread and hard boiled eggs dipped in ashes. Eggs were regarded as a sign of mourning, either because "eggs have no mouth, and our grief is too strong also for words," or because eggs, possessing the seed of rebirth and regeneration, are symbolic of resurrection, hence are given to mourners on returning from the burial of their relatives. In the medieval ghettos, the Jews would walk in stockinged feet to the synagogue, although some rabbis permitted the wearing of shoes on the street in order not to arouse the jeers of the passing Gentiles. In the synagogue, however, and at home no shoes were to be worn. The symbols of mourning increase and become intensified in the synagogue. The ark is stripped of its ornamented curtain and in the Sephardic synagogues this is substituted

by a black cloth hung in front of the ark. Only a few dim candles are allowed. The regular pews are discarded for low benches or the bare floor. At the conclusion of the evening service, the usual exchange of greetings is omitted and throughout the day no greetings are exchanged among friends as they meet each other in the street or in the synagogue. The custom of visiting the graves of relatives and of learned and pious men in the morning after the service has been variously explained. Of course, such pilgrimages are conducive to further sadness, but the real purpose may be the desire to beg the purified souls of the departed to intercede in behalf of Israel before the throne of the Almighty, so that the woes of Israel might come to an end. While work is not forbidden, many are careful not to undertake any work or to engage in business until after the morning services are concluded.

11

TISHA B'AB — SHABBETAI ZEBI'S BIRTHDAY

“The first-begotten son of God, Shabbetai Zebi, Messiah and Redeemer of the people of Israel, to all the sons of Israel, Peace! Since ye have been deemed worthy to behold the great day and the fulfillment of God’s work by the Prophets, your lament and sorrow must be changed into joy, and your fasting into merriment; for ye shall weep no more. Rejoice with song and melody and change the day formerly spent in sadness and sorrow into a day of jubilation, because I have appeared.”

This was the text of the message sent out to all the communities of Israel by Shabbetai Zebi, through his secretary, Samuel Primo, abrogating the Fast of Tebet in the year 1665. This was the first drastic step taken by the self-

proclaimed Messiah in his attempt at breaking with our rituals, which according to tradition would be abrogated in messianic times. The orthodox Jews, who were timid about giving up these observances and tried to prevent the spread of these heretical views, were too weak to withstand the growing influence of the reputed Messiah, and some of them, especially in Smyrna, the birthplace of Shabbetai, narrowly escaped with their lives when they endeavored to oppose the innovations. In the following year, Shabbetai was placed under arrest when he appeared in Constantinople and was kept in the state prison at Abydos for three months. On the day preceding Passover, he slew a lamb as an offering, which he and his followers ate together, after having pronounced the blessing: "Blessed be God who hath restored again that which was forbidden." He was allowed considerable freedom by the Turkish officials and his fame was still further enhanced through the suffering which he was supposed to have endured in behalf of his mission. Prayers for him were inserted in the regular services in many European Jewish communities, in the following formula: "Bless our Lord and King, the holy and righteous, Shabbetai Zebi, the Messiah of the God of Jacob." His picture together with that of King David appeared in new editions of his prayer book, published in Amsterdam.

Among the many revolutionary changes in the ritual and in the observances which he or his disciples introduced was the conversion of the Fast of Ab into a holiday, a day of rejoicing and merrymaking. Tisha b'Ab was Shabbetai's birthday, corresponding to July 23, 1626. Circulars were sent out to all Jewish communities directing the celebration of the Ninth of Ab as a festival, with a special service, for which the chanting of special psalms was prescribed, with eating of choice meats accompanied by music and singing

It is said that very few Jews in the whole of Europe fasted on that day. In the service as well as in the grace after meals, the day was designated as "the day of comfort, the birthday of our King and Messiah, Thy servant and first-born son." As is well known, Shabbetai abandoned Judaism on September 16, 1666. Only a few weeks after his birthday had been so widely celebrated on the Jewish day of mourning, he put on a Turkish turban to indicate his conversion to Mohammedanism. Although this act did not entirely stop the movement and for many years afterwards his followers continued the propaganda in his behalf, the great bulk of Jewry became disillusioned and quickly restored the many ceremonies and observances which he had rejected. It is said, however, that the *Donmeh*, the Moslem Shabbetian sect, which still has some survivors in Salonica, has continued to observe the Fast of Ab as a day of feasting and rejoicing, observing it as the natal day of the Messiah whose second advent is expected by them.

Strange as it may seem, the Shabbetian craze did not subside even after Shabbetai's banishment and death in a small village in Albania. Many Jews in Europe, including some famous talmudic scholars and leading rabbis, secretly entertained the belief in Shabbetai's messiahship, in spite of the bans of excommunication that were issued against all such believers by the rabbis of the time. The famous Emden-Eibeschutz controversy in the eighteenth century emphasized the extent of the pernicious influence of this movement. It is related that for many years after his death, some very pious and observant Jews would break the fast of Tisha b'Ab, since they did not want to violate the sanctity of the birthday of the Messiah by fasting.

THE SABBATH OF CONSOLATION

“Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.” This is the initial verse of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, assigned for the *Haftarah* to be read in the synagogue on the Sabbath following the Fast of Ab. After the period of mourning for the destruction of the Temple and for the glory that has departed from Israel, after the fasting and weeping on the Ninth of Ab, the day marked for a series of misfortunes in the history of our people, it was deemed appropriate to read this stirring chapter, introducing a series of consolatory prophecies delivered to the Jews in the Babylonian exile. The prophecy has no heading, no name of author and no indication of the time of its delivery. It bursts out with the impassioned plea for courage and hope, as if the prophet could not contain himself any longer and could not waste time on such preliminaries.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia from 604 to 562 B. C. E., a period of 42 years, was a great conqueror and succeeded in making Babylon the center of diplomatic activity and the ruler of the entire Middle East. Judea was subjugated in 586 and the greater part of its inhabitants transplanted to Babylon. Their lot was not very hard. Many of them succeeded in establishing themselves in their new environment and were permitted to follow their customs and traditions without much interference. They had their places of assembly, where they listened to the words of instruction by the prophets, and their attachment to the religion of their fathers became greatly strengthened and even purified, so that we hear no more of idol worship among them, a vice against which the earlier prophets had preached and warned. However, the national feeling, the desire to return to their homeland, was not dimmed by the

prosperity which they enjoyed. They guarded against contamination by the idolatrous atmosphere round about them, kept together in the observance of their national holidays and looked forward to the time when their redemption, as promised by the prophets, would come about.

After the death of Nebuchadnezzar the gradual decay of the Babylonian dynasty set in and in the course of two generations Babylon became so enervated as to become a prey to any power that would arise and supplant it. The denouement came quickly with the rise of the hitherto obscure and insignificant Persia, under the rule of Cyrus, who had accomplished marvelous feats in his battles with numerous nations. The doom of Babylon was at hand and the prophet envisaged in this doom the liberation of his people and their return to their own land. It was probably after one such victory scored by Cyrus, perhaps the conquest of Croesus of Lydia, that the prophet burst out with these words of comfort to his people. With the subjugation of Lydia, Cyrus had an open road to Babylon and the imminent fall of this powerful empire was interpreted by the prophet as the harbinger of Israel's redemption. History justified the prophet's prognostications and the famous document issued by Cyrus, permitting the Jewish exiles to return to Judea and to rebuild their ruined homes soon followed.

The 42,000 returning exiles encountered many difficulties in their efforts at rehabilitation, especially from groups of usurpers who had settled on the land during the period of exile. These enemies made many attempts to thwart the work of the Judeans by calumniating them before the Persian rulers and they at times succeeded in retarding the work, especially of the rebuilding of the Temple. It took considerable time before the Jews finally could entrench themselves again on their patrimony.

The parallel to modern conditions is quite obvious. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 has often been compared with the document issued by Cyrus twenty-five centuries earlier, and the difficulties in the way of its implementation have not differed widely from those which our ancestors had to face at the hands of the Samaritans, the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites at that time. Other perils threaten us today, perhaps more formidable than any that we encountered on the tortuous paths of our history; but the clarion voice of the prophet, bidding us to retain our hope and our courage, should serve as a balm to our wounded hearts and distraught spirits. "Behold, the Lord God will come as a Mighty One, and His arm will rule for Him. Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him."

13

ISAIAH'S CONSOLATORY PROPHECIES

For seven consecutive Sabbaths following upon the Ninth of Ab the *Haftarahs* are taken from the consolatory chapters of the second part of Isaiah, in which the Jewish exiles in Babylonia are given new hope and new faith in their national rehabilitation. So effective was the perusal of these chapters on the Jewish soul that some of the early Christian emperors prohibited their use in the synagogue, hoping thereby to break the spirit of the Jews and destroy their hope of redemption and thus make them more likely to listen to the allurements of the Christian missionaries.

With clear preception and prophetic insight the exilic prophet beheld in the continuing victories of Cyrus, the overthrow of the crass idolatry of Babylonia and the restoration of the Jewish exiles to their ancient patrimony. He saw in Cyrus, king of Persia, the Messiah, the looked-for

redeemer of Israel, and in Israel redeemed he beheld the true "Servant of the Lord," who would bring spiritual enlightenment to all the nations. "Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon him, He shall make the right to go forth to the nations . . . He shall not fail nor be crushed, till he have set the right in the earth, and the isles shall wait for his teaching" (Isaiah 42.1-4). Those who failed to see the hand of God in the world events and hesitated in the great mission imposed upon them, he designated as "the blind" and "the deaf" who are unable to see the signs of the times or hear the message that they bring.

The words of the prophet were realized. Not quite a quarter of a century after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, the city opened its gates to the new conqueror, Cyrus of Persia, and soon after that came the famous proclamation which permitted the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their sanctuary. The collapse of mighty Babylon could be regarded as nothing less than the direct intervention of Providence, and the redemption of the Jews following it was naturally taken by the Jewish leaders as a sign of God's special favor toward them.

In glowing and heartening terms, the prophet described in these chapters, which have been selected for reading in the synagogues during these Sabbaths, the great glory awaiting Israel and the great service that it can now render to the rest of the world. And when many of these promises remained unfulfilled even after the return, the optimistic Jewish spirit continued to hope for their fulfilment in the future.

In all their subsequent trials and misfortunes, the Jews turned to these comforting prophecies of Isaiah and they were strengthened in their faith and their powers of endurance were roused and their hope was revitalized. The day of mourning and weeping is followed by the Sabbath

of Comfort: the tears are dried, the bent body assumes a proud posture and all doubts and misgivings are replaced by a sturdy courage and joy-giving hope. This has been the source of Jewish optimism and a reason for Jewish survival throughout all the ages.

X

SPECIAL DAYS AND SPECIAL PRAYERS

THE MONTH OF ELUL

THE month of Elul is the sixth month of the Jewish civil year which begins with Nisan, and the twelfth month of the religious year which begins with Tishri. The name given to this month, like the names of most of the other months of the Jewish calendar, was borrowed from the Babylonians and probably was used by them as the name of a deity. When the Jews were exiled to Babylonia, they apparently adopted the calendar names of their neighbors and later took these with them when they returned to Palestine. In the Bible there are no Hebrew names for the months or for the days of the week, both being designated by ordinal numbers. There are a few Phoenician names preserved in the earlier books of the Bible, but in the post-exilic books the Babylonian names are used. The name Elul is found only once in the Bible (Nehemiah 5.16).

In medieval times, the month of Elul was set aside as a month of preparation for the coming days of judgment, Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur. It has become customary to blow the *Shofar* every day of the month after the morning service, excepting the Sabbaths and the eve of Rosh Hashanah, to mark the distinction between these sounds and the sounds of the *Shofar* on the New Year. The Kabbalistic reason for the custom of blowing the *Shofar* during the month of Elul is that Satan may thus become confused as to the exact day of Rosh Hashanah, when he is about to come before the Throne of Judgment as the accuser of Israel. Another tradition has it that Moses ascended Mt. Sinai for the second time, after the sin of the

Golden Calf, on the first day of Elul, stayed there forty days and came down again on Yom Kippur. When he ascended the mountain, the *Shofar* was blown in the camp to announce his departure to the people so that they might not again be misled into sin because of miscalculation. The custom of blowing the *Shofar* on the first day of Elul thus became established and later was extended to the entire month. The real reason for the custom is probably to remind the people of the approaching Holy Days, so that they should repent and cleanse themselves of all sin before the advent of the Days of Judgment. The rabbis use the allusion in the initial Hebrew letters of the phrase in Song of Songs 6.3: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine," which spell out Elul.

Throughout the Middle Ages and even in more modern times, the advent of the month of Elul brought with it to the Jewish communities a feeling of solemnity and sombreness. The services at the synagogue attracted larger numbers than during the rest of the year; groups for the study of devotional literature held more frequent sessions which were attended by larger crowds, and the sermons of the preachers (*Maggidim*) assumed the tone of admonition and warning, of threat and exhortation. The fear of the impending judgment was real, and made the people contrite and forgiving, careful in their dealings and scrupulous in their observance of the minutiae of the ceremonial law.

In the Sephardic communities of the Orient, special penitential prayers (*Selihot*) are chanted every evening of the month of Elul, while in the Ashkenazic communities *Selihot* are said each day at dawn, beginning with the Sunday preceding Rosh ha-Shanah, and, if the holiday comes on Monday or Tuesday, on the Sunday of the preceding week instead. The sexton of the community used to go from house to house, long before dawn, and exhort the people to wake up and proceed to the synagogue for the chanting of these

penitential prayers. On the first day, the *Selihot* would be said at a very early hour and the more pious people would spend the whole night in the synagogue in study, so as not to oversleep. In American orthodox synagogues, the custom prevails of chanting the *Selihot* after midnight of the first Sunday, an occasion for which the *Hazzan* usually prepares an elaborate repertoire of melodies for the various hymns included in the service. Unfortunately, in some congregations, the occasion is utilized to advertise the prowess of the *Hazzan* and his choir, so that the sale of tickets for seats on the holiday may prove more successful.

Every morning and evening, throughout the month of Elul, and by some extended also throughout the month of Tishri, Psalm 27 is recited, a psalm that is expressive of the deepest faith and complete reliance on the kindness and mercy of God. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" It is customary to conclude every letter sent out during the month with good wishes for the coming New Year.

2

THE SELIHOT SERVICES

The *Selihot* are regarded as specimens of the oldest liturgical poems in the extensive collection known as *Piyyutim*. The root (*Salah*), from which the term is derived, means "to forgive," and the contents of most of these are of a conciliatory and penitent nature. The title of these poems expresses the hope that the prayers would be accepted and pardon granted. Perhaps in no other prayers in the entire range of the Jewish liturgy is the feeling of the nearness of God to human affairs as boldly and as intensely depicted as in the *Selihot*. Many of them were composed in times of

distress and persecution and contain a heartrending outcry against the cruelties perpetrated upon the Jews by their enemies and an appeal for divine aid and redress. One may discern in some of the phrases used an effort to maintain faith in God's justice and mercy in spite of the evident and palpable injustice dominating the world, especially as affecting the Jewish people. Thus one poet cries out:

Lord, I remember, and am sore amazed
To see each city standing in her state,
And God's own city to the low grave razed;
Yet in all time we look to Thee and wait.

What a struggle between the desire to rebel against the bitter lot assigned to Israel in the world, and the determination to maintain faith in Providence at all costs! The deep and simple faith in God's justice and His love for Israel is manifest in every selection. "Whether we are regarded as the children of God or as the slaves in His household and whatever the sins we committed may be, our punishments should be sufficient to elicit complete forgiveness and favor," is the plea of the poet. Another author, the famous Rabbenu Gershom, known as the "Light of the Exile," narrates in simple sentences the various incidents in Jewish history when Israel suffered because of its sins and then redemption came. The present exile, however, seems to have no end and if our sins are so enormous that we have to suffer so much more in expiation, the author prays for special privilege from God and for more speedy redemption.

The form of the compositions included in the *Selihot* differs but little from the regular *payyetanic* hymns of the synagogue in the use of the acrostic, of the rhyme and of the strophe arrangement. The diction also is of the same nature, drawing largely upon biblical quotations and talmudic or midrashic allusions. References to historic events are

very frequent, since many of the *Selihot* were composed during periods of great national or communal misfortunes. There is one *Selihah* that is common to all rites and used on all occasions, and that is the supplication which appeals to the Thirteen Attributes of God (Exodus 34, 6.7) for forgiveness and mercy. The quotation is preceded by two different paragraphs, which are used interchangeably and both have a plaintive chant, which is generally used.

Some of the favorite themes used by the authors of the *Selihot* are the stories of the sacrifice of Isaac and of the sufferings of the Ten Martyrs who met cruel deaths at the hand of the Romans during the Hadrianic persecutions. The reason for the popularity of these subjects is that they indicate great faith and surrender to the will of God, which should be accounted to the credit of their descendants. This appeal underlies the doctrine of *Zekut Abot* (the Merit of the Fathers) which implies that, if we are unworthy of considerate treatment by God, we pray that He should show us mercy because of the devotion to Him on the part of our ancestors. The greatest manifestation of faith was seen in the readiness with which Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice at the behest of God, and this is therefore repeatedly recalled in our prayers in different forms. The martyrdom of the foremost ten scholars of their age also indicated their unwavering faith in the face of the supreme sacrifice demanded of them; and their merit, it is hoped, may help us.

While some of these *Selihot* go back to the period of the Mishnah, the first two centuries of the present era, most of them were composed during the Middle Ages, even as late as the eighteenth century. Among the authors are included some of the foremost poets and teachers of that long period as well as a number of persons otherwise unknown to Jewish history. The *Selihot* produced by the Spanish Jewish poets

have a refined style; many following one or another of the meters introduced into Hebrew poetry from the Arabic, but in religious fervor and rabbinic allusions they are exceeded by the German and French liturgies. Intense persecutions produced a variety of these poems and the many allusions imbedded in them have proved a great aid to the student of Jewish history. There also exist many special *Selihot* prepared to commemorate certain events that occurred in specific Jewish communities. Their use is confined to the communities affected and to the days which are the anniversaries of the events commemorated.

The established custom is to recite *Selihot*, not only on the days preceding Rosh Hashanah and the ten penitential days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but also on all the regular fast days, except the Ninth of Ab when a special collection of elegies and lamentations known as *Kinot* takes the place of *Selihot*. The naive and simple message that the *Selihot* convey stirs the depths of religious emotion and attunes the individual to the solemnity of the spiritual self-examination which the days are intended to usher in.

3

THE NATURE AND VALUE OF PRAYER

What is the value of prayer in present-day Jewish life? Do we really expect that when we ask for certain things our request will be granted? If this is not the case, then what is the use of prayer? Primitive man worshipped his gods out of fear of their powers. He believed that the gods must be propitiated or humored into granting his desires. Indeed, he even felt that at times they could be forced through some magical formulae or incantations to accede to his wishes. Enlightened religions spurned this idea, but still maintained the idea of worship, first in the form of

sacrifices and then through speech, developed into the elaborate system of the liturgies of the respective creeds.

The concept of prayer has not been removed entirely even in the most liberalized forms of religion in modern times, but has undergone a tremendous change in accordance with the change in our conception of God and His relation to the world.

The Hebrew term for prayer is *Tefillah*, which means, etymologically, intercession, mediation and pleading. It presupposes a God who is near to us, accessible to and interested in us. To pray to a god or to a number of gods situated on Mt. Olympus and remote from all mundane things is ridiculous. Prayer implies not only the nearness and lovingkindness of God, but His approachability even by the humblest of mankind. In Jewish theology no need is found for a human or semi-divine intermediary between man and God. The Jewish concept of God is as of a Father, an idea frequently expressed in our liturgy. The notion of angels, appointed to represent Israel's petitions before the throne of the Almighty, is a later development and has its origin in the mystic ideas of the Kabbalists or the romantic sentiments of the poets. The primary idea of Jewish prayer is the desire to commune with our Father, to tell Him of our love for Him, of our gratitude for His goodness and mercy towards us, and to lay before Him our needs and desires. "Our God and the God of our fathers;" and "Our Father, our King" are the terms of address with which we approach God in prayer. There is a warmth, a closeness, an intimacy in these expressions which declare that whatever the answer, our requests are made known to a loving Being, Who cares for us and Who will do what is best for us.

God surely knows our thoughts and desires. What need is there therefore to give expression to them? This is quite true; and still the human soul yearns to give articulate

expression to what is uppermost in its consciousness at any one time. Prayer does not affect God, but ourselves. In prayer, the divine within us asserts itself, seeks its union with the divine in the universe and through that becomes ennobled and glorified. God needs none of our praises and supplications, but we feel impelled to pour out our hearts to Him and by doing this we come to be in greater harmony with our spiritual selves, and with God, the spiritual element in the universe.

When beset by doubts and perplexities, when surrounded by trouble and misfortune, when exposed to sickness and grief, one seeks refuge in prayer, to give expression to this feeling of anxiety before God, his Friend and Protector. Do we expect our prayer to be granted? Indeed we do. We pray and hope that our desire will coincide with the will of God. Of course, very few reason the matter out in all its logical implications. The theologians have discussed the problem throughout the ages; they have endeavored to reconcile the idea of God's immutability with the belief in the efficacy of prayer; they have built up elaborate theories about the clash between the wisdom of God and the puny desires and ambitions of mortal man. All these matters are of little concern to the average person who is moved by great joy or by great grief to utter a prayer. He does it in the consciousness that God's wisdom is inscrutable, that His justice is perfect, and His love all-embracing. "May it be Thy will, O Lord our God" are the opening words of many of the petitions scattered throughout our prayer book.

Public worship, of course, has many other purposes besides that of prayer. It is, however, in private devotion that the real communion with God may be attained to a degree higher even than in the synagogue. Based upon the conviction that God rules the universe and can change the phenomena and the laws of nature, which He has created, prayer does not reckon with the theological problems and

difficulties and rises above rational thinking. Some may call it mysticism, but the human soul is mystic in its nature and refuses to be confined to the limitations of intellectual laws. Who can tell whether greater truth is to be found in mathematical formulae than in the yearnings of the human soul, which assume certain axioms even as the mathematician does. We know that prayer has been one of the most potent influences in human life, that it has brought peace and satisfaction to many a crushed spirit, and that it has raised many a drooping soul to the heights of spiritual elation by the contact formed with God, the Father of us all, Friend and Guide of all human beings.

4

THE KIDDUSH

The custom of ushering in the Sabbath and the holidays with a blessing pronounced over a cup of wine is of great antiquity and the rabbis make the observance obligatory, classing it as a biblical command. The term applied to the ceremony is *Kiddush*, meaning sanctification, not in the sense that by this ceremony the day becomes sanctified, since we can add nothing to the sanctity of the days set aside as holy days by divine command. The *Kiddush* is symbolic of the sanctity of the day, whereby we are to be reminded of its nature, that it is not merely a day of rest and cessation from labor, but also a day devoted to holy purposes. The commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy," was applied by the rabbis to this ceremony, which declares the holiness of the day.

Some modern scholars connect the *Kiddush* with a festive meal which was partaken of by families and groups on the occasion of the entrance of the Sabbath. At dusk on Friday, these groups would assemble at a definite place, where an

elaborate meal was served. Before beginning this meal one of the company raised a goblet of wine, pronounced the blessing over it and let the members of the group partake of it. A similar meal was partaken of at the time of the exit of the Sabbath, which accounted for the origin of the *Habdalah* ceremony. The rabbis have laid down the principle that the *Kiddush* should be recited only at the place where and at the time when the meal was eaten, and it was only in exceptional cases that they permitted the *Kiddush* to be pronounced in a place where no meal was served. This provision is regarded as corroboration of the assumption that the *Kiddush* was originally part of the festive meal. The fact that the *Kiddush* was later introduced in the synagogue service has been explained on the ground that strangers who happened to remain in a certain locality over the Sabbath were usually accommodated in a room adjoining a synagogue, where they took their evening meal, so that the *Kiddush* was really said in close proximity to the place where the meal was served. The custom of reciting the *Kiddush* in the synagogue continued in vogue also after the provision for strangers on the synagogue premises no longer obtained. A later authority, in an endeavor to give a reason for the maintenance of the custom at present, saw in it a pedagogic provision whereby the common people would get a lesson in the manner of observing the ceremony. The *Hazzan*, who usually faces the ark during services, turns around to face the congregation, with a cup of wine in his hand, and chants the formula and then tastes the wine from the cup. In many communities the custom prevails to let children come to the reading desk and to give each one a sip of the wine, instead of the *Hazzan* drinking it.

Wine is regarded as the most proper beverage for the *Kiddush* ceremony. However, in places where wine is scarce and expensive, the custom is to pronounce the formula over

the two loaves of bread that are on the table on Sabbaths and holidays. Because the *Manna* did not appear on the Sabbath day and the people were ordered to prepare twice the usual portions of *Manna* on Friday, the custom was established to have two loaves of bread on the table on the Sabbath, reminiscent of the two measures of *Manna*. It is also customary to cover the bread with some ornamental covering, so that the two loaves are between the table cloth and the bread covering, even as the *Manna* was between two layers of dew. The *Kiddush* itself consists of two benedictions, one over the wine or the bread, and the other declaring the sanctity of the day. Both reasons given for the Sabbath in the two versions of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus and Deuteronomy — the Sabbath as the reminder of the creation of the world by God and as a memorial of the Exodus — are included in the paragraph. Preceding these benedictions, the first three verses of the second chapter of Genesis are recited. On the holidays the text varies, a special reference being made to the reason for the observance of the particular festival. On Passover the *Kiddush* is not said in the synagogue since it is assumed that no Jew would remain unprovided for on this festival.

5

THE KADDISH IN THE LITURGY

The *Kaddish* prayer occupies an important position in the Jewish liturgy. It is recited by the reader at the end of every service, and a briefer version of it (*Hazi-Kaddish*) is also chanted at the conclusion of certain sections of the service. A more elaborate form of it, moreover, is recited at the conclusion of the study of sections of the Mishnah or Talmud and a still longer version is recited at the service after burial. The best known form of the *Kaddish* is the so-called Mourn-

er's *Kaddish*, which is recited by those who are in mourning for a departed parent. It is because of the frequency of the recital of this *Kaddish* that the prayer is sometimes mistakenly designated as a "prayer for the dead," a most unfortunate and entirely erroneous designation for this beautiful doxology which contains not the slightest reference to death or to the dead, except in the paragraph inserted in the reform prayer book.

Originally the *Kaddish* was a prayer of praise of God, containing references to the hope for the coming of the Messianic period, with which aspiration the teacher would dismiss his classes after study. It is based on the concluding verse of the Messianic prophecy of Ezekiel: "Thus will I magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the Lord" (38.23). The custom of concluding a discourse with a reference to the Messianic hope has prevailed throughout the ages and is still followed by many preachers. Study and worship were closely related in Jewish life, the former being regarded as a form of worship, so that the traditional prayer book contains many passages from the Bible and Talmud which have no prayer quality in them. The important part in the recitation of the *Kaddish* was the response made by the congregation: "Let His great name be blessed forever and unto all eternity," besides the Amen said at the conclusion of each paragraph. The rabbis looked upon this response with great reverence and even attributed to it the power of exerting an influence in the heavens above, to change an evil decree passed upon an individual. The special *Kaddish* that is now used at the end of a study lesson (*d'Rabbanan*) still contains the specific reference to the students and scholars, and is the original form of this prayer. In former times, names of specific personalities, famous for leadership and learning were inserted in this *Kaddish*. Because it was recited in the

presence of the entire congregation after study in the school-house, the *Kaddish* was said in the vernacular Aramaic rather than in Hebrew.

The idea that the pious deeds of his sons may aid in redeeming a parent from the sufferings inflicted upon him after death, as a punishment for his sins, is mentioned in many rabbinic passages. The punishment after death is supposed to extend no longer than for twelve months; hence the custom arose for sons of a departed person to recite such prayers in public and elicit proper responses on the part of the congregation during the twelve months of mourning. In this manner, the son hoped to alleviate the suffering of his parents through his piety and the response he evoked. Later, because of the feeling that it would be improper for a son to entertain the idea that his parents would be subject to the extreme penalty of twelve months' punishment, the period of the recital was reduced to eleven months and one day. The *Kaddish*, however, is entirely free from any such allusions, being a paean of praise to God and a prayer of peace for Israel. The recital of the Mourner's *Kaddish* implies the belief in the immortality of the soul and in future reward and punishment, which are important elements in the Jewish religion.

The force of this custom is evident in its prevalence among all classes of Jews, even such as have very little connection with the synagogue otherwise. What is the psychological motive that forces thousands of young people to make the sacrifice day after day, while at other times they hardly give a thought to the synagogue or to their religion? There can be no doubt that the primary impulse comes from the desire of the child to do something to favor his departed parent; the filial affection seeks concrete manifestation and Jewish tradition prepared this form for its expression. That which in the first few weeks of mourn-

ing was a sincere effort to translate a deep emotion into an established ceremony usually becomes a routine later on, which has lost much of the finer spirituality surrounding it. The mumbling of certain incomprehensible words, as is the case in many instances, can hardly be regarded as an elevating or worthwhile practice. On the other hand, the custom has helped to maintain a certain bond of union with their people on the part of many, and to emphasize a degree of loyalty to Jewish institutions. To that extent it is worth preserving; but at the same time it is important that the public should be enlightened as to the true meaning and purpose of this ceremony.

6

THE THANKSGIVING DAY FESTIVAL

The uniquely American festival of Thanksgiving is traced back to the proclamation of Governor Bradford providing for a day of thanksgiving and prayer for the New England colonies after the first harvest in 1621. Two years later, the day set for fasting and prayer because of a drought was changed into a day of thanksgiving when rain came in the midst of the prayers. It gradually became an established custom for the governors of New England to designate annually a day of thanksgiving for the colonies after the harvest. During the Revolution, Congress annually recommended a day of thanksgiving, and the first national proclamation for the observance of the day was issued by Washington in 1789, when Thursday, November 26, was set aside for prayers of thanksgiving for the states of the newly formed union. It is strange that the second presidential proclamation did not come until 1795. There were occasional objections to the national acceptance of this holiday, especially on the part of the southern states,

because of its puritanic origin and religious character. It is probably for this reason that the Congress of the United States never made it a national holiday, although it did proclaim a day of thanksgiving at various times, especially after wars. Presidential proclamations regarding Thanksgiving Day have been issued regularly since 1864, usually designating the last Thursday of November.

The thanksgiving idea is found in the Bible in connection with various national events in ancient Israel. The Plymouth Colony Puritans were undoubtedly moved to establish this institution by their great reverence for the Jewish Bible and familiarity with its contents. The prototype of the American Thanksgiving holiday they undoubtedly found in the ancient festival of Sukkot, which is described in the Bible as the festival of ingathering. The Puritans did not adopt the symbolism of the Sukkot holiday, the four species of vegetation or the dwelling in booths. They confined their observance to formal services in the churches and to abstention from labor. They also discarded entirely the joyous character of the Sukkot festival as repeatedly enjoined in the Bible. This would have been contrary to the somberness of Puritanic life and outlook. Even that chaste rejoicing in which the Israelites indulged at that season of the year, tempered by acknowledgment of God's nearness and protection over them, was shunned by the austere Puritans who regarded mundane life from the angle of its futility and unworthiness as compared with the life to come.

The most widely used food in the celebration of this peculiarly American holiday has been the meat of the turkey, a bird that is native to America in a variety of species. The common wild turkey is still found in Mexico, Texas and Arizona and these, after they had been tamed and fattened, were used by the early settlers. In fact, it is quite certain

that the turkey was also used by the Indians as a fine dish for gala occasions. It was introduced into Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth century by the Spaniards. The colonial records relate that in the year 1621, when the first Thanksgiving was held, in gratitude for the abundant harvest of that year, "there was also a great store of wild turkeys," and hunters were sent out in the woods to secure them for the holiday dinner. By the end of the seventeenth century, turkeys were rather scarce in New England, although they continued to be plentiful in more southern states. William Penn related that in his colony turkeys weighing thirty pounds were sold for a shilling each.

There has been considerable discussion as to the origin of the name for this bird. The Standard Dictionary gives the reason for the name that it was erroneously thought to have come originally from Turkey. Some believe that the name was given to it because of its repeated call-note, *turk-turk-turk*, so that it may almost be said to have named itself. An even more ingenious explanation was given, namely, that the merchants who brought the bird to the European markets were for the most part Jews, who "thought that this new bird was a kind of peacock and so called it by their (Hebrew) name for peacock which was *tukki*" which later was corrupted into *turkey*. The word *tukki* is found only once in the Bible, in I Kings 10.22 (and in the parallel II Chronicle 9.21), where the various precious objects that King Solomon's vessels, in company with the vessels of Hiram, King of Tyre, brought from Tarshish, are enumerated. The translation of peacock for this word is found in the early renderings, the Targum, Syriac and Jerome, but the origin of the root is obscure. The German name, *Kalekuttische Huhn*, may also be in imitation of the sound produced by the bird. The French *coq* or *poule d'Inde*, probably relates to the origin of the turkey associated with the

American Indians, certainly not with India. The Hebraic origin of the name is just as plausible as any of the other explanations offered for it.

In 1869, Governor John W. Geary of Pennsylvania, following the established custom, issued a proclamation designating Thursday, November 26, as Thanksgiving Day, exhorting the people of the State to refrain from work and to assemble in their chosen places of worship to thank God, "with Christian humility," for His blessings. He further added that the people should pray "that our paths through life may be directed by the example and instruction of the Redeemer, who died that we might enjoy all the blessings which temporarily flow therefrom, and eternal life in the world to come." The reference to the Christian Savior in the proclamation called forth a vigorous protest from the rabbis of Philadelphia, who took offense at the reflection cast upon the thousands "who hold a different creed from that which he avows." They resented this encroachment upon their rights as citizens and appealed "to the sense of justice which animates our fellow citizens that a conduct so unwarrantable may receive the rebuke it deserves." The protest was signed by the following ministers: Hirsch, Bettelheim, Jastrow, Morais, M. Cohen, G. Pape and J. Frankel.

Governor Geary did not reply to this protest, nor did he in any way intimate that he had made a mistake in the references quoted. This brought forth a lengthy article in *The Occident*, from the pen of its distinguished editor, the late Mayer Sulzberger. With his trenchant pen and clear logic, Judge Sulzberger made it clear that the Executive had no right to issue a proclamation which aimed at the sectarian observance of any one day in the calendar, and that he was acting against a clear constitutional provision in assuming superiority of one religious sect over another.

While many of the present generation will not agree with the editor of *The Occident* in making the proclamation for the observance of Thanksgiving Day on the part of the Executive of a state or of the nation an illegal act, most Americans today will regard the references included in Governor Geary's document as having been in bad taste and resulting from a narrow point of view — a view which takes no pains to consider the feelings of others. The proclamations of Presidents and of Governors were never regarded as mandates, but rather in the light of suggestions to the people to maintain an American tradition which is the result of true piety and of a high moral sense.

Jews especially are glad to perpetuate this custom, since it is admittedly based on the teachings of the Bible, which have been such a potent influence in the lives and habits of the Pilgrim Fathers. It is, however, of great interest to note with what zeal our leaders of the past generation watched over the honor and dignity of the Jewish people and allowed no slight to pass without expressing their feelings with force and with dignity.

7

CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS

The only reference to a birthday celebration in the Bible is the mention of the festivities in honor of the birthday of Pharaoh, when he recalled the chief butler to his former position, as Joseph had interpreted his dream (Genesis 40. 20). There is no definite allusion to such celebrations among the ancient Hebrews, although the custom existed among the ancient Persians, Greeks and Egyptians. It need not be assumed, however, that, because the Bible is silent about it, the custom did not exist. Common people

may not have paid much attention to the annual recurrence of their natal days, but the kings and nobility undoubtedly made use of these occasions for public festivals and for dispensing favors and grants to those whom they wished to honor. In Egypt, we are told, that "the birthdays of kings were celebrated with great pomp. They were looked upon as holy, no business was done upon them, and all classes indulged in festivities suitable to the occasion." The Syrian kings were even more particular in this matter than the Egyptian Ptolemies. According to the Books of the Maccabees, Antiochus Epiphanes ordered that his birthday be celebrated monthly, not annually, by the offering of sacrifices to the gods, in which the Jews were compelled to participate.

The famous dance of Salome was performed on the birthday of Herod Antipas, when he gave a feast to his nobles. As related in the Gospels of Matthew and of Mark, John the Baptist apparently rebuked Herod for marrying Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Herodias then became so enraged at the effrontery of the pious Essene that she wanted to have him beheaded at once. Herod, however, did not agree to this for fear of arousing the populace against him, and had John arrested. On the day of Herod's birthday, when he made a supper for his lords and high officers, Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced before the assembled party, and so greatly pleased Herod with her dancing that he promised to grant any request she desired to make. Upon consultation with her mother, Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist, and although Herod was not pleased with the request he had to acquiesce because of his promise.

Throughout rabbinic literature, the celebration of birthday anniversaries among Jews is hardly ever mentioned. The custom itself was known to the Jews mainly as one having vogue among the Gentiles. There seems to have been

current a notion that the birthday anniversary was a lucky day for the celebrant, as his star would render him protection on that day. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi relates that the Amalekites were magicians and in their war with the Israelites in the wilderness they placed on the battlefield only such soldiers as celebrated their birthday on that day, feeling certain that no mishap would come to them then. Moses, however, knowing of this, caused disarrangement of the constellation, and thereby won the battle over them. According to rabbinic law any such divination is prohibited and punishable by stripes. The legal prescriptions of the rabbis imply that, while the birthdays were not observed as feast days, they were carefully noted and remembered. Many civic and even criminal laws depend upon an accurate knowledge of the birthday of a person, indicating that records of these were kept in the family and could be consulted at any time. It is upon the basis of such records that the legal majority of persons would be determined as well as many other points of importance in deciding the status of a person before the law. Although the *Bar Mitzvah* celebration is probably of comparatively recent origin, perhaps not earlier than the fifteenth century, the exact age of boys and girls was kept on record for civil and religious reasons and the question of the exact birthday of a person in a leap year occupied the serious attention of the rabbis.

In modern days the custom of celebrating the birthday anniversary of some prominent individual has become general also among Jews, and in Western lands individuals and families are very careful in the observance of their own birthdays or those of the members of their families. While many are still careful to observe the anniversary of the death of a relative on the date according to the Hebrew calendar, most keep their birthday anniversaries according to the dates of the civil year, since this is not regarded as a religi-

ous ceremony. A very laudable practice, which originated with the German Jews, is for disciples and colleagues to present to a prominent teacher on the occasion of his celebration of some epochal birthday anniversary, usually the seventieth, a volume of essays written by them on the subject in which he is especially interested. Within the last half century Jewish literature has been greatly enriched by a number of such Jubilee volumes of outstanding importance because of the valuable contributions which they contain. Zunz, Graetz, Steinschneider, Hildesheimer, Hoffmann, Guttmann, Adolph Schwartz, Kohler, and several others have been honored in this manner, and that type of literature which has of late been extended to the case of the birthday celebration of important Jewish institutions, has become quite voluminous and of considerable importance to the student. Whether one who celebrates his birthday with a feast is to be regarded as imitating the Gentiles, which is prohibited under the law known as *Hukkat ha-Goy* is still a moot question, although custom apparently decided it in the negative.

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